



Spotlight On Recovery

"Giving a Voice to The Therapeutic Community"

"Writer's Choice" Part 7



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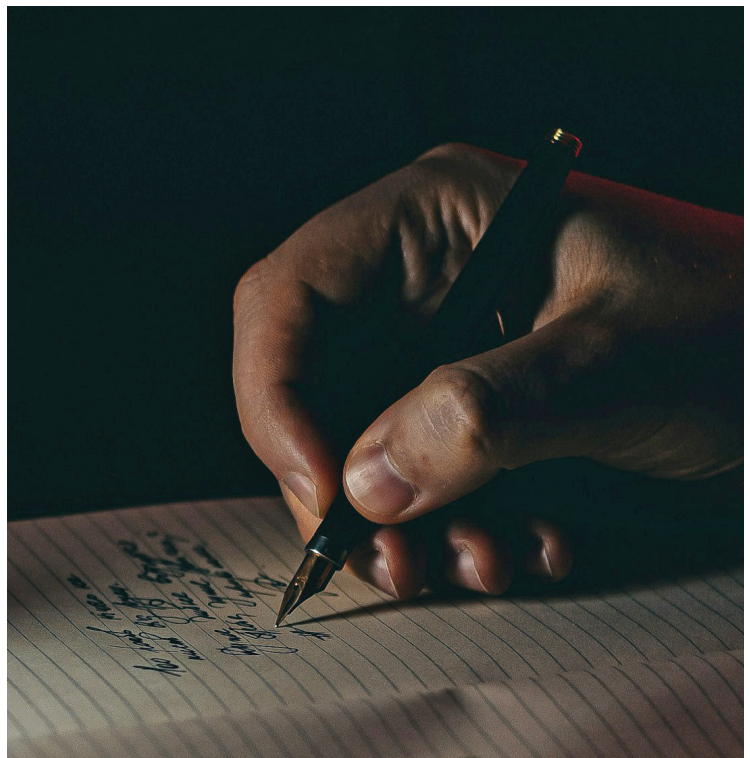
A PEN IN A PEN

By Clint Sherman aka Marco Noguerras

In a pen, the pen is my legs;
my freedom to walk about
without restraints.
I escape beyond the lines
while I reside.
Through it, I become vivid;
in other's eyes, like holography

In the pen, the pen
allows me to recuse myself
of my nadir hiatus.
Elevating spirits with it,
like an outer body experience,
my presence can be felt.

A pen in a pen is an in to an out.
A passport to the clouds; to no end.
One can write a book and sign an alias.
One can write a writ or Habeas.
Write a friend or a loved one.
Some can even write catchy hooks and songs.
A pen in the pen transforms,
a nook to a portal.



FEBRUARY 2024

LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

Dear Family,

This is my seventh installment of The Writer's Choice. It is my pleasure to open the floor to my contributing writers to submit articles about the issues that are on their mind. The first Writer's Choice issue was published in 2015, and I have two writers, Jay Glenewinkel and Efrain P. Morales, Jr. who were featured in that issue, eight years ago. Jay has been writing for Spotlight on Recovery since 2012 and Efrain has been with the magazine for 8 years.

Each article; is written from the heart and life experiences of our writing team. When you read the articles, you can also feel them. The writers speak about the hard things, like pain, hurt, struggle, and loss. These topics are difficult to discuss out loud, and are usually discussed in a quiet room with a therapist; and sometimes on special talk shows that are highlighting the pain and struggles in America.

Spotlight on Recovery magazine, has always put a 'Spotlight' on the hard topics that need to be talked about in the open. We hope we can inspire everyone who picks up a copy, to talk about the hard topics with their families at home. Both Tiffany Woods and Dominique Carson speak about having heart-to-heart talks with their family members, those who are struggling with life issues and encouraging understanding the struggles of your loved ones.

Spotlight on Recovery encourages open discussions at worksites. If each employer had a safe space where an employee could openly discuss their issues, with an onsite social worker or mentor, they may not feel so alone, in a building full of people. We all have heard stories of job related suicides in recent years, including the police officers who were present during the Insurrection on January 6, 2021; who took their own lives; and as recently as January 8, 2024, when a College Administrator at a Historical Black University committed suicide; allegedly due to bullying.

Spotlight on Recovery magazine encourages discussions within all churches, big and small; because like it or not, these issues do exist and they will not go away until they are a part of the national discussion, everyday. Just four sincere words: "How Do You Feel?" followed by seven more words, "Would You Like to Talk About It?" followed by six more words, "I'm Here, If You Need Support." Everybody knows somebody who is struggling; give them your attention.

Sincerely,

Robin Graham

Robin Graham

Founder/Publisher



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Brooklyn, New York 11236

LETTERS TO THE PUBLISHER

Dear Ms. Graham,

Thank you for your kind words and wise counsel. You truly embolden me to think and experience things on a deeper, more profound level. Your words were not harsh, but totally, something or a perspective I needed to hear and consider. I was both enlightened, and liberated by your point of view. So much so, that I went into my parole hearing with so much more clarity and peace of mind.

It went so well that I have no expectations. It was the most catalytic, the most empowering, and the most culminating experience I could have ever imagined. To have my family present, supporting, and speaking up for me was the most unifying and exciting part of the experience.

To just be able to freely and openly have a conversation about uncomfortable information in fully transparency is something that I owe so much to you. My sister actually spoke about your magazines, giving me a voice and a space to express myself; my trauma journey. I am so grateful.

Dr. Michael McCray

November, 2023

Dr. Michael McCray has been a contributing writer since 2022. He is also a contributing writer for *As Above, So Below: Collective Message from Incarcerated and Returning Citizens*; which is also published by R. Graham Publishing Company.



Good afternoon, Ms. Graham

I got the e-mail you sent and there are a lot of interesting topics to choose from,

This is a great platform for individuals like me. With such idle time, it's easy to waver from a good thing. This place is like a vault in which there's a lot of treasure stored and locked away.

I see it every day, I hear it and evidently I feel it. So I would like to thank you and other wonderful individuals, such as yourself from all parts of my heart for this blessed platform to rebuild our faith, our broken dreams and hope once ago abandoned.

It gives us assurance that YAHWEH is alive and real, despite some of us feeling like we are not worth it and don't deserve his mercy, his grace and loving kindness is all encompassing. We must first remember to love ourselves all over again and forgive ourselves and not pretend if we won't to proceed.

There's one particular topic that instantly spoke to my soul and directed me to an unfinished piece I have. It's about the encouragement of women. I honestly believe that mothers shouldn't be celebrated for just one time out of the year but should be commemorated everyday for the rest of their lives, regardless if they have children or not. Women are the backbones to life, despite me losing mines at an early stage in life, I could recognize the power they possess.

Well I been spreading the good news to the talented brothers around me and they definitely feel you. I gave them your contact info and they'll be in touch.

Until then, you stay blessed Ms. Graham, and have a blessed day.

Massillon Lherisson –

December 2023

Massillon Lherisson is an artist who will have his artwork featured in the Spotlight on Recovery magazine’s first ever Art and Recovery issue, coming in April 2024.



Dear Robin,

First, and foremost, I would like to offer you my sincerest apologies for my absolute silence over the last year or so. Secondly, I wanted to say thank you for always keeping me in mind when you have new topics. I truly am blessed to have discovered a friend and sister like you. Even after most people would’ve long given up on me, as a lost cause or waste of time, you’ve continued to show that you genuinely care about people like me.

For that, words could NEVER express the depths of my gratitude to you.

Arcane Element

December 2023

Arcane Element has been a contributing writer since 2016. He has been featured in the following issues of Spotlight on Recovery; “Survivor,” “Leaving the Streets Behind,” “Brother, Can We Talk? Part 2,” “Writer’s Choice, Part 4,” Spotlight on Recovery’s 20th Anniversary issue and “Writer’s Choice, Part 7.”



Advertising Price List for Spotlight on Recovery:

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- Full Page: \$175.00
- Inside Back Cover: \$250.00
- Back Cover: \$400.00

***Discounts: Buy 2 half page or full page advertisements in different issues of the magazine and receive a third advertisement for free!
Expires on April 30, 2024.**

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HOW DO YOU FEEL?



SO LOST

By Joseph Williams

*“How does a man lose everything and continue to go on?
To pick up the pieces of his life, that look to be shattered -- only by way of belief in second and third to even fourth chances.” - Joseph Williams*

As I sit alone, spent and emotionally drained, I wish I could quash my face in my lap and stay entrenched there. What’s the point of gaining everything to just lose it over and over again?

It is rumored profound poets speak on or say ‘It is better to love and lost, then to have never loved at all.’¹ I embrace the theory of that’s the mantra; who in the hell really knows?

Repetition can destroy you or allow you to excel. Some say, having such traits of being repetitiveness; can be seen as a benefit. However, what do you do when your receptiveness puts you in a constant spiral that only shifts downward?

This has been my story since my adolescence. Now, as I sit here grown and knowledgeable of my actions, the effects of right or wrong; a negative versus a positive, Thomas Edison theory; ‘where did I go wrong,’ lingers in my mind. Scared to breathe vastly and inhale the foul odors and smells that surround me. A space of detox, captivity, and misery has my mind, body, and soul entrapped. I’ve been in these conditions before far too much. You would reckon I should be accustomed to my environment.

How does a man lose everything and continue to go on? To pick up the pieces of his life that look to be shattered -- only by way of belief in second and third to even fourth chances. This terminology could be a naïve way of thinking. Lost and gain, we all experience in this life. As to live, then suddenly vanish, you and all your belongings. All you’ve cherished and held dear gone as if it never existed, without lineage or maybe a photograph, neither did you.

These are my thoughts that weigh this bench down.

Similar to bags of sand; falling into a bottomless ocean, my head sinks further; it may reside on my lap after all. Many men have planned and prepared for their future even their family’s future. Health insurance, savings accounts, etc. but the man above invariably has the final say. I pray one day, I too can gain his favor; me; a lost soul, a sinner, a man of few to no preparations. By now, you probably speculated where I’m at, that my bench resides in a cell, one of many inside this police district. Too many times, I’ve sat here consumed by grief and loss. But, this time, it’s quite a contrast. Regaining my losses won’t be without difficulty as they usually have been. This feels like outer body stuff. I lost more than drugs, money, or the gun I had to toss. Even the car I owned now on the back of a tow truck somewhere in traffic.

I lost me - Joseph Williams. I don’t know who I am!

To my family I am unrecognizable; even the mirror frowns down upon me. In a race to obtain more wealth, material items, and status, I was doing more at a higher pace, harsher crimes, so dedicated to being evil. Swathed inside a tornado I ultimately vanished within. Now flesh and bone remain; a remnant of the man I once was, totally lost.



¹ Alfred Lord Tennyson poem: In Memoriam A.H.H.



MY SKIN IS MY SIN

By Arcane Element

I was birthed into this world and already had two strikes.
As a Black man, I was condemned to die, before I even had a life.
If it wasn't a physical murder, then it would be a lengthy incarceration.
I would cease to be a factor through some form of elimination.

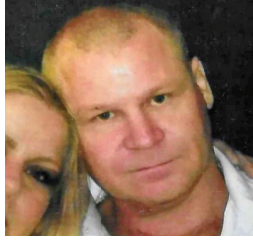
Even in modern times, racism still finds endorsement.
We've witnessed bigots, disguising themselves as law enforcement.
Remove your knee from my neck! Don't you see that I can't breathe?
But with callous disregard, so everyone could see,
you still intend to murder me.

I am Ahmaud Arbery and I am George Floyd.
I'm every Black face that has been cast into the void.
America, why must your perception of me be a view that's so unkind?
And why do the lives of your animals hold more value than mine?

You thought I was angry before? Well, now I have a reason.
I'm pissed because you continue to target me like it's open season.
My struggle isn't real for you because you don't understand my plight.
But everything I do; while being Black, can get me shot down on sight.

The land of the free?
Well, now let's not pretend.
I was never more than a slave in your eyes,
because my skin, is my sin.





ANOTHER

By Jeff Morrison

I gazed in the mirror
and an image stared back at me.
One of my life and all
that was supposed to be.
I think about my life and those paths I have taken.
To look where I've landed, my soul torn and shaken.

To find myself in this cage,
distant from my dreams.
Another world -
Another life -
Another man,
staring back at me.

There's a part of me, that writes to tell my story.
Some listen and others don't,
I can't change that or the past.
But, I can make a difference in the future.

Anyone who has a heart
or understands losing oneself,
can appreciate anyone; who finds their way back.
I have another dream, another life, because
I am another man.



THE PAIN OF A FATHER

By Will Easter

Pain hurts and rivers run; people drown in their own supplications;
as damns burst and tears don't stop. Many days of rain, is my pain.
Thoughts of the past; the children I lost, this hurt I can't get by...

Pain hurts and there are days I feel like I can't get by.
Tears cascade as the drama boy plays.
Ocean floors submerged as deep as my pain
and no matter how fast I run; I can't get away.

No help; I can't breathe!
No more will I ever hear,
"Daddy, can you come get me?"
Pain so deep, as is the blood
that runs through my veins.

"No baby, don't go, daddy ain't ready to let go.
Lord, why me?
Why does my pain, run so deep,
as if Hell reigns underneath me.
No sunlight, no smiles;
just stone cold faces, with frowns.

Every token; I was ever given,
was taken.
I was balled up; submerged, spit out,
and left in darkness.
I'm still trying to figure out
how to climb out of this womb.

Pain hurts and rivers run, damns burst and tears don't stop.
Many days of rain, is my pain with ocean floors,
submerged as deep as my pain,
as the blood that runs through my veins.

Through this poem, your names will reign forever.
The beauty in every word,
is an outstretched hand,
still providing inspiration, even in death.
Mikey, spread your wings!
Star; fly high!
Damion; spread your wings!
Now soar!

Gone, but never forgotten.
For every word that I speak,
let your names forever reign,
even in death; let your inspirations carry me.





I'M MAD BECAUSE....

By Monique Houston

We all have experienced different emotions: happiness, sadness, and madness. This writing is to demonstrate that we all feel all kinds of emotions. However, when you can channel your emotions, and stabilize your emotions, to where they are not out of control, then and only then can you write about anything.

Your writing doesn't just become a hobby, it now moves to becoming ART. We begin to dig deeper, and our writing becomes art and we become Artist. I now introduce you to a piece titled 'I'm Mad Because.'

"I'm Mad Because" is not just any piece although, as I write this article I hope to ignite peace; the peace of being able to speak up and speak out freely yet wisely. To know that we don't always get the opportunity to speak out makes me mad. It makes me mad to know that men can do just about anything, get away with it, and still hold his position. Then, a woman does the same thing and she is patronized, dehumanized, and she is treated as if she has committed the ultimate sin. However, a man does wrong, and he's elected into office and celebrates his next win.

I'm mad, because we are trapped; in a system that we are supposed to trust. The system is built, to destroy your spirit and crush your soul.

I'm mad because we all complain about who's in office, but then we don't even care to vote.

I'm mad because we are the reason each person, is put in office.

I'm mad because we allow discord to divide us and beg God to unite us and then get mad at Him for the division we sowed among ourselves.

I'm mad, because I'm hurting and no one sees. Crying and no one cares. Not even the ones who promised to be there.

I'm mad because I care so much about you, and how I wish you felt the same. I wish you could see me for the way I see you.

Oooooooh, I'm mad because you might read this and think I am disappointed in you.

I'm mad, because you only see what you want, but hey; that would never be me.

I'm mad because at the end of this paragraph you still won't understand.

I'm mad because in your eyes, I'll never be enough. My loyalty would never be enough. You only see the flaws in me. It's crazy, because even your flaws, I don't point out.

Why?

Well, because our imperfections are made perfect; through one person who loves us the most, God.

All I can say is, I'm mad because.

I'm mad, because I have the most forgiving heart.

I'm mad because most people know it and try to take advantage of it.

I'm mad, because they don't even realize I see right through it.

I'm mad, because sometimes we make the worst decisions and then take years to rebuild after making them.

I'm mad because we allow people to hurt us, misuse us, abuse us, betray us and then we heal...only to allow someone else to do it all over again.

I'm mad because we long so hard, and wait so long for someone to love us back, only to find out the way we love, is not how they love.

I'm mad, because sometimes the person you love; loves you too late. And by the time they love you back, the two of you no longer can relate.

I'm mad, because I am writing this from a pure place, safe space. I'm pouring my heart out all into this art. As I write, 'I'm Mad Because' - I realize being mad is a choice.

It's an emotion, it's our right to say how we feel. But, it's also our right to let go of being mad.

I'm mad because I realize I don't have to be.

So today, I'll drop my madness and I welcome peace. I'm letting go of my madness, and love is what I'll choose to release.



The United States Freedmen Project is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that seeks to fulfill the abandoned missions of the Freedmen's Bureau and the Freedmen's Savings and Trust Company. Through historical education, data analysis and political representation, the United States Freedmen Project advocates for reparative justice at the federal and local level for all descendants of Freedmen who have been systemically bottom-casted and denied the promised life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

DESCENDANTS OF U.S. FREEDMEN TODAY

- Approximately 13% of the U.S. population.
 - Own less 3% of the nation's total wealth.
 - Unemployed at approximately 2X the rate of white workers.
 - 40% of homelessness population.
 - 15% of NY State Pop, 43% Incarcerated
 - Infant mortality rate is more 2x;
 - New mothers die at 3-4x rate of white mothers
 - Black Homeownership at 1968 levels
 - Graduate college with 15% more debt than their white counterparts
-

Join us to learn about:

Who we are? | Freedmen History | Our advocacy work

Thursday, February 15th & March 21, 2024, 6-7:30PM

Zoom: <http://tinyurl.com/USFreedmenProject>

Contact:



<https://usfreedmenproject.org>



admin@usfreedmenproject.org



[@USFreedmenprj](https://twitter.com/USFreedmenprj)



WOULD YOU LIKE TO TALK ABOUT IT?



BREAKING UP WITH DARKNESS

By Nina Rondon

I was in love with the darkness.
We've been together for a while.
Far away; but so close, I could feel it holding my hand,
kissing my cheek, as I grin and bear it; putting on a fake smile.

At first our relationship seemed normal, natural; I would say.
We were right in all the wrong ways.
Maybe we were soul mates, a concept I often wondered about.
I craved love, so what's the harm in loving the darkness,
the cold, lonely dark cloud?

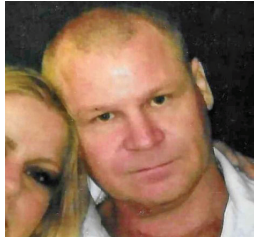
It wasn't long, before I noticed the pressure
the darkness was putting on me.
Expectations as deep as the ocean,
a ball and chain locked to my wrists.
Drowning would be the only option in a situation like this.

The more we were together, the more I noticed a shadow growing;
hovering over me like a tree.
It didn't shade me, it was grief.
I wasn't comfortable, I wanted out,
but it's been so long since I spoke up,
I lost my voice, I couldn't shout.

This would be the first time I stood up for myself,
I feel the stiffness as I swam up from the depths.
It looks like such a long way up, but I have to do this,
I have to take this step.
I can see the light, the more I move close like
I was being reborn; a seed discovering its growth.

When I finally reached the surface,
I have to admit I felt lost.
This is the first time I'm out on my own, without the darkness.
What am I without it?
Maybe I should go back?
I can hear it call. No! I need this!
I've set myself free.
This is how I broke up with the darkness.
How I found... me.





“TEARDROP”

By Jeff Morrison

One single teardrop you see falling from my eye.
Within this teardrop there are things I cannot hide.
A self-explanatory explanation to a haunting past,
a devastating destruction of Meth, Cocaine, and cash.

Some months, I wouldn't sleep at all.
My tolerance was so high,
my mind was racing,
my heart was pounding,
there was no fear within my eyes.

Always on the go, spinning and rushing.
Days, weeks, and months passing,
like they were nothing.

Then one dream turned into a nightmare,
when all things fell apart.
Insanity and self-destruction,
I knew this from the start.

Now I'm far; far away from home,
distant, lost and scared.
Where are all those people
who always claimed they cared ?

Now the hours seem like days,
and the days seem like months.
The years I foresee may be very lonely ones.
No drugs, no hopes; my dreams all wipe away,
with this one single teardrop
you see, falling from my face.



I wrote this poem from my heart because when you write truth, the words tell your story. Sometimes in life, you think you know everything when in truth you know nothing. Coming into a prison system and having to discover how wrong you've been with your thinking makes you really take a look at everything you've ever done in your life. My cell is 5 by 9 feet. You can reach out and touch the walls from both sides. This is the place my thinking put me, before I wised up.

It's taken me years to forgive myself, and no, it's not just about me. It's about all the people who trusted and believed in me who I hurt badly, by coming to this place

with my thinking. I've hated myself for doing all this to them. I have felt like a loser and failure, but now the true me has shown himself to be a loving, warm, trusting, upstanding man.

Every day I set out to do something good in here, to make a change in someone's life big, or small. A basic act of kindness can go a long way. Just try showing love, when someone's hurting, and watch what it does and how it changes that person. I'm not perfect by far, but I take notes, even on myself because I'm open to being corrected.



GIVING A VOICE TO OUR PAST

By Jay Glenewinkel (a.k.a. Kopper Storm)

Under our own skins is life unseen to our naked eyes. Life is more than just there, here and now, it is spiritual, it is eternal. When we lose someone close to us, we either put them in the ground or burn their flesh and bones. What is unseen is our past; right next to our future. We most often ignore the subtleties we see within our own spiritual self. Life is not just breathing or eating, it is inside our own pasts, with those who've seen us come and go already.

In my previously published article titled "NORMAN, WAITING" (Spotlight on Recovery, October 2021), I wrote of the journeys my grandparents shared throughout their physical existence. When I wrote "NORMAN, WAITING," it was long before my grandmother had actually passed on. Though I was hundreds of miles away from my grandmother before she had passed, I knew my deceased grandfather of over a dozen years was right there waiting for my grandmother to move on to the next realm, because I saw both of them in this realm through the eyes of astral projection.

Now, several years later, more than either we or I know, my grandparent's legacy is written in the stars. While I've been away from everyone I love for more than a decade, I have lost some of my ghosts. This time my history holds me responsible for my future. I never imagined I would gain so much by losing everything. To know true loss is to know who and what matters most in life. To me, the first thing that matters most is family. While I include my here and now family in this quote, I also include my native blood.

Through historical research and genealogy, I have learned that some of my oldest ancestors in the world were of Norse and Celtic heritage, dating all the way back to when the Celtic Goddess Brigid (pronounced Breed), and the Norse Goddess Freya walked the fields of what is now known as Germany and Northern Ireland. These Goddesses, through blood, are direct descendants of me, and my family through my grandfather's (NORMAN, WAITING) side of the family.

More research has also revealed that more of my direct ancestors sailed from Germany to Tejas (Texas) territory in the late 1700s. Some of my direct bloodline helped found the original town of Seguin, Texas in the late 1780s. In mid-1801, Apache Natives raided the original Seguin, killing everyone and wiping out the entire town. Some of my family, known as Michael, Ida and Ana were killed in the raid, however, lost records recovered revealed that the bloodline remained intact through Ida's incestuous relations with family in nearby communities.

While most of my heritage derives from ancestral ties, there's much more to my spiritual working. Though loss over the years, I've gained enormous amounts of insight and knowledge into who I really am. To trust me now is to trust in humanity. Over the years, I've paid attention to what's going on in this world. The most hurtful events to me have been the mass shootings; as well as the kids; who were raped and murdered, over the years. Whenever I could, I would go to a quiet place to send out my blessings to not just honor those who were murdered, but more so, to keep their Spirits alive. To name a few examples, the children at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut in 2012 and at Rob Roy Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas in 2021. To simply say-- their names or the place where they died, not only keeps their Spirits alive, but it also lets them know; that they are not forgotten.

When we speak the names of those who lived before us; or those who were needlessly taken from us, we give ourselves the honor of knowing who they still are. You are their connection to eternal life.

When a drunk driver killed my wife, Wendy Sumner after she was assaulted in a bar earlier that night; right then I knew that Wendy was indeed, my soul mate. To relive memories is to honor their past and future at the same time. To understand me today is to know who I have become as a spiritualist.



OUR WORLD OF CHAOS

By Glenn Slaby

I wrote this article for myself, to show the self - hope.

“Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break and all things can be mended. Not with time as they say; but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you.” L.R. Knost

Is the world and national situation getting more desperate, dangerous? Or is it just instant and mass communication bringing disconcerting news faster than the human brain can adopt?

Has the world, humanity really become crueler, more depraved? It's the overwhelming influx, just read the Bible, any cultural historical text. We've improved, changed unfortunately, very slowly. There will be wars, conflicts, disease, hunger, poverty, racism, tribalism, etc. Unfortunately, new issues have arisen as regional issues from droughts to disease, have extended across continents and oceans - globally, while today's weapons and weapon systems reach further, faster, causing more destruction. And globalization has uprooted local sustainable economic means. Climate issues, diseases do not recognize national boundaries.

The Good News: Humanity has become more self-aware.

There are those who want to learn from past catastrophes. Our world is getting smaller, more complex. Our interdependence on goods (supply-chains) has become more complicated and fragile, as the COVID epidemic has highlighted. Mass communication has assisted in the COVID crisis, and nations have united to combat this virus. Communication has also made the world aware of other diseases and crises, preventing larger outbreaks and dispersion, such as Ebola.

We don't know, through human interactions/interventions, how many wars/conflicts have been avoided. How many diseases, halted prior, to spreading. How many wars have been prevented, how many lives saved, how many are more educated, more self-reliant? This is not quantifiable. The UN, WHO, Doctors Without Borders, the Red Cross, The Red Crescent, many, did not exist, a hundred, even eighty years ago. The Foundations, Gates, Rockefeller, Ford, various



medical institutions; many people care. There are hundreds, thousands, international, local, and religious organizations, seeking, and making a difference. Some, many may be inefficient, cumbersome, even some with questionable financing, however, ordinary people care. Remember the Great Tsumani of 2004. Some leaders cared – a world network of buoys and warning systems were developed. Consider the Seed Bank, a specific facility in Norway, where seeds; of every major plant are kept, to replenish in the event of a world disaster. Various individuals, organizations are developing, designing new ships to remove plastic from the seas, some converting to use as their fuel.

“What bleeds, leads,” the common theme of print and visual media. Good news doesn't sell. Good news is hidden. View the various technological, environmental,

energy/solar, food aid programs and publications. There is change. There is growth. Slow, but reassuring.

Maybe humanity has hope. Maybe we are beginning to grow.

Negative news, may even be considered a path toward growth leading.

Women speaking up led to the “Me Too” Movement. Environment catastrophes lead to positive reactions, however slow. Of the many tragedies recorded to sell papers, there are those individuals reporting to display injustices. And technology has aided in the dealing of justice, reforms, the reality of racial hate, i.e., George Floyd.

Humanity is on a learning curve, slowly moving toward fairness. The election of right-wing leaders and popularity, American demagogues has incited many to counteract, but not enough. Slowly we are learning. We saw how the world united, again slowly and erratically with the pandemic. Lessons have been learned - - may we pray, to be acted and improved upon. May citizens of all nations recognize the need of quality leaders, not those dealing, emotional rhetoric based on fear. Each of us must react in a positive way, from small acts of kindness to speaking out about the necessity of reforms.

We cannot be overwhelmed by the negatives; simultaneously, we must try to see the good – seeing to our neighbors, our communities, the least of us, strangers thousands of miles never to meet. For those, long gone who have struggled due to human indifference and hate, we must carry on dreams.

“Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful; be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year; it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.” - John Lewis

Our hearts are afflicted because we know humanity can do better and will. We are not alone; however, we are a silent majority. We are, each of us, on a journey, part of the larger whole, unseen.

Silence is complicity, doing nothing is complicity. Hope is in our voices, our actions, our work, in small deeds. In acts of random kindness, spiritually, physically, emotionally, we all have something to share in another’s journey. What we do here, is reflected in this physical realm and the spiritual, because the world situation upsets us to such a great degree, there is hope. We maintain a piece of soul’s humanity, of caring, of spiritual essence. We are all part of a Great story, a spiritual Epic. We are the Story, as individuals, as whole, throughout the eons.

Change the world, one Act of Random Kindness at a time, building an ARK, of goodness.

Can it spread?

Maybe I have convinced myself Hope exists.

“Forces beyond your control can take away everything you possess except one thing, your freedom to choose how you will respond to the situation.”- V. Frankl



SPOTLIGHT ON RECOVERY IS STILL ACCEPTING ARTICLES FOR THE REMAINING TOPICS:

YOUR CHILDREN ARE WATCHING – RELEASE DATE OCTOBER 2024

Our children are like sponges. When you put good things into their spirit, they will return good things to the world. When you put negative things into their spirit, they will return negativity to the world.

Our children are not only watching how you move, talk, laugh, dress, cook, and dance, they are listening to the other sounds around them. They are hearing all types of sounds in the streets, on social media, at school, on the bus, on the news and on the playground.

It is so important that **your voice, your love, your spirit, and energy**, overtakes all the other noise in the world. The noise that's trying to take advantage of the curiosity of a child, over the foundation you took the time to build.

Please feel free to share how your curiosity made you stray from a foundation that provided you with safety, love, and positivity and what parents should be aware of to protect their children and the future of our children. **Due date: March 30, 2024**



THE LAST TIME I SAW LOVE – RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 2024

When was the last time you saw love?

Not made love, but saw it, in someone's deeds, in some one's speech, or felt it in someone's embrace, in a sign from God or in the color of the sky on a day when you were feeling low.

Could you identify love if you saw it again?

Could you share the many shapes, colors, lessons and ways that love has given you hope, an answer, or understanding?

With the wars in our communities and abroad taking over the news and headlines, I want to talk about Love. This is what gives our world hope, but this world is swimming in chaos.

Let's remind the world what Love is... DUE DATE: MARCH 30, 2024.



THE MISANTHROPE

By Phillip C. Blackwell

I've the unfortunate distinction of having served time in multiple prisons in three different states.

Now, this depressing fact doesn't make me an expert on crime and punishment, but it may give me a somewhat wider field of reference than the average bear when it comes both to the criminal justice system (CJS) and to the broad spectrum of pathology with which that system invariably intersects.

In recent years, I've had occasion to reflect on ideas of 'Restorative Justice,' which seeks to replace the punitive and draconian paradigm of 'crime and punishment' with a more humanistic approach that focuses on people, relationships, accountability, harm done to individuals and concrete steps taken to repair such harm.

Indeed, the precepts of 'Restorative Justice' seems, on their face, eminently practical and efficacious; over time I suspect (hope) these merits will win out over the backward, retrograde politics that is so antithetical to progress and change.

Of course, I have as well, developed a rather more exhaustive critique of the CJS as a whole, and especially as it relates to the historical and continuing mistreatment of Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC), and the primary role played by the CJS in perpetuating racial and social disparities.

Moreover, it's difficult to talk about the CJS without using inequality as a 'foundation' and then building from there. These stark and ubiquitous realities are never far from my mind. However, those things are tangential to what I want to write about now.

In the opening, I mentioned a 'broad spectrum of pathology,' and just now I find myself thinking about some of the people I've met over the years and how those encounters continue to inform (and perhaps color) my view of the world.

To be sure, I've met all kinds of people in prison. More to the point, I've met men who have specialized in all kinds of crime. Over many decades, in various penitentiaries, I've gotten to know arsonists and pimps

and sleight-of-hand experts, forgers and shoplifters and boosters; I've been acquainted with pyromaniacs and streakers and peeping toms, con men and flim-flam artists and counterfeiters.

I've known smash-and-grab boys and short-change artists and chain-snatchers. I've been in conversations with strong-arm specialists and beat-down doyens and tune-up boys - guys who knew hundreds of ways to hurt someone; in countless situations. I broke bread with armed robbers, and carjackers and highwaymen, cardsharps and phone-scammers and tax-evaders. I've met horse and cattle thieves, (yes, even in this day and age) and pickpockets and extortionists and ID thieves and kidnapers.

I've sat at table with pedophiles and gropers and men who exposed themselves in public, I've known hired killers and those who killed out of anger or for revenge or for sport. I've met bomb-makers and safe-crackers and B&E experts, guys who - by any measure - possessed impressive technical skill sets; and of course I've encountered drug dealers by the thousands.

In sum, I've crossed paths with rogues, scoundrels, rapists, brigands, knaves, dope fiends, reprobates, anarchists, nihilists, thieves, misfits and miscreants of every sort and variety, men who - collectively - may well have broken every law in the criminal code.

As I reflect on this multifarious cast of characters (alas, my peers), I find myself transfixed by the plethora of common denominators, not between the men in this group, but between this group and everyone else in the world.





OBSOLESCENCE OR ACCEPTANCE

By Leslie Williams

(Featured in: Ten to One Odds by Leslie Williams aka Kleva Talent)

How well do we know the people we incarcerate or jettison from our lives, thoughts, and every day conversation? What skills or talents did they possess or may have acquired that could possibly be relied upon or beneficial; even now? Or do we even care?

Too often, we jump to judgment and/or alienate one another, but when tragedies occur in our own lives, are we willing to accept help from those we disdain? How can redemption begin if there is no forgiveness for the past?

When I pled guilty in 1998 to a crime I hadn't done, my plan was to use that time in prison to turn my life around because I wasn't doing the right thing out on the streets. However, after all my hard work, all society cared about was the accusations against me. They didn't care that I was innocent, or that I spent 9 1/2 years working on becoming a better person learning and teaching Braille, learning new languages, building a relationship with God, and helping others cope with the stresses of prison life.

Society wasn't interested in knowing how that 9 1/2 year sentence benefitted me, if at all. When we don't have personal ties to someone it's easier to turn our backs to them, or not think of them as people. Take any famous person you like, someone you believe in, your hero or s/hero; you hang on their every word, watch every Youtube footage or podcast, go to every event and spend your last twenty bucks. What if your hero or s/hero, were accused of an unforgivable act; against another human being or a child. Your first instinct, would be give them the benefit of the doubt. The newsreels would talk about their accomplishments and use the words 'allegedly,' to describe the accusations. Why? Because you and possibly those who put out the newsreels have great, respect for these heroes and s/heroes. However, if said hero or s/hero was some average girl or guy next door; that no one knew anything about, and ugly or heinous accusations were broadcasted about them, society would be salivating to penalize and abandon them.



Why?

Because there is no personal connection, therefore, any personal attributes or accomplishments she or he may possess get overshadowed by the allegations.

This is the reality prisoners and ex-prisoners are confronted with everyday. The world just seems to give up on those of us it doesn't know or doesn't want to know. And it's this 'nobody likes me' feeling, and the 'I will never be accepted anyway' attitude which drives us to search for comfort in things like drugs, alcohol, and self destructive behaviors. Patterns that we willingly create but are hard pressed to undo because being stripped of these self inflicted protective barriers only reminds us of the exposure we felt when we were vulnerable, overlooked, and taken for granted.

Therefore, instead of turning towards self-destructive devices and turning away from each other why not try; turning away from things like bullying, taking advantage of one another, and making each other feel small and insignificant? For there is no wrong that love can't overcome and there is no crisis that can't be averted, if we are willing to work and stick together. It is only when we reject love, empathy, and embrace stigmas that we begin to cast one another into the shadow of obsolescence.

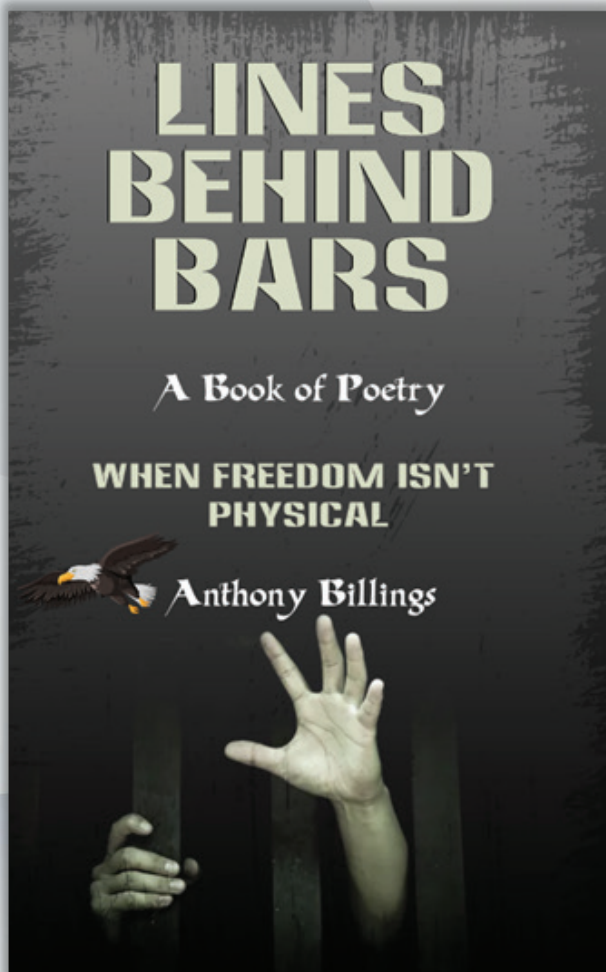
FIRST TIME CONTRIBUTOR

ANTHONY BILLINGS

TURNED SELF-PUBLISHED AUTHOR!

How fitting would it be that the first place his writing was introduced to the public in 2013 is now (10 years later) the first place that he would announce his first self-published book release to the public? Well, that's the case here with "Lines Behind Bars" and Spotlight on Recovery magazine.

This book is a collection of his best poetry that was written while incarcerated. These poems range from being funny, sad, inspirational, and eye-opening. "Lines Behind Bars" will take you on a journey of different emotions and you will surely find at least one that you can relate to.



"LINES BEHIND BARS" IS NOW AVAILABLE ON AMAZON, BARNES & NOBLE, AND OTHERS.





FALLING IN LOVE AGAIN

By Richie Leo Williams

I remembered your funeral like it was yesterday. How I cried my heart out as I walked away from what I knew would be the last time I saw you; thinking 'how the Hell will I breathe again without you.'

I never thought our love would end this way. Going back down memory lane; we were introduced to each other by way of a relative of mine. 'Weekend Lovers' we called each other for months at a time, sneaking around to keep from hurting our families and causing unwanted attention. The warm feeling you gave me and your encouragement had me thinking I was Superman, or could solve the world problems. Your tan brown skin was smooth and soft. Your perfume scent was Mexican or Columbian. Nothing could compare to you, so I broke our weekend rule and found myself wanting you all the time, lying to family, friends, and associates to be with you.

'I was whipped;' you were mind blowing. Then we said we couldn't live without each other. I left my family, friends, leadership in my community, and business behind for a taste of your love forever. But, when all my money was gone you became too demanding; disrespecting me saying things like, 'Richie Leo Williams, I don't care if you have to sell your a%% on every street corner, rob, steal or kill for money just to keep me around; like Nike, 'just do it!'

Her loving had me going in circles. I became the property, she was my pimp; taking thousands daily from me, and it still wasn't enough for her. She said 'Baby I know some drug dealers, banks, and churches you can rob, who would know? I got your back, I am your Bonnie, and you're my Clyde.' I said, 'Let's ride!' But, something went wrong on the third bank robbery; they had too many cameras, and bank alarms.

I was featured on the evening news; a wanted man, \$10,000 for any clues. Now, I'm living like a slave on the run; weeks with no showers, dumpster diving for food. I looked in the mirror and asked myself 'Who the hell are you, dude?'

I was unrecognizable, screaming, 'God, please save me! I am too ashamed to ask for help!'

Finally caught, the next thing I heard was the judge's gavel hit and his voice say 'Life you deserve.'

I said, 'Judge I wasn't always this way. Look at the holes and track marks on my arms. These drugs made me this way. It was love I thought.' The judge said, 'Son, where is your heart now?' I said, 'Judge, when I am broke, she's never around. The crimes were all for her.' The Judge said 'Richie Leo Williams, love would never treat you this way.'

Now 10 years behind these mean prison walls, lots of groups, honesty, pain and self inventory became a part of my daily routine. I found out the hard way that drugs, alcohol and violence; this false love was temporarily masking my pain. I had to find out if I could go through Hell without allowing false feelings to control my life in the worst ways.

I had to find out, if I can love myself despite the painful seasons in my life.

Now, I am falling in love again with myself. I had to learn in prison that real love can't be bought or sold. Falling in love again with myself allows me to realize I am worthy of peace, joy, honesty, and love.

Drugs, alcohol, and violence can't produce any of the above, but guaranteed death, prison, and a life filled with misery. I know its a painful price to pay; serving life in prison just to learn to live a better way, but there's no coming back from death so learning the hard way, is better than death; weather in prison, or another painful way.

I choose to thank my God for every day.

I am falling in love again with myself and I dedicated this article to myself.

HOLIDAY ADDICTION

By Tiffany Woods

A few months ago, we celebrated Thanksgiving. Family and friends were gathered together in thanks for the opportunity to share the art of fellowship with each other. Sitting around a table filled with food and love, having conversations with family and friends whom they haven't seen in months.

Watching Thanksgiving football is a joyful time with family. I remember attending family gatherings where one family member stood out from the group of loves ones; the family member who seemed to be there only in the physical form. This family member is the one who struggles with alcoholism. Alcohol is served after dinner and beer is served for the sports games. Everyone seems at ease, but everyone is watching him or her out of the corners of their eyes.

Can you image the people you love and who love you; watching you like a stranger? The feeling is uncomfortable. The only question that comes to mind is 'Why can't they just love me for me or try to have a mature conversation with me?'

To their surprise, he or she does not partake in drinking beer while watching the game. Nevertheless, he or she heavily indulges in the sweets and the holiday feast. For most people, the holidays are depressing times of loneliness and hopelessness; a time to drink or use drugs to erase the sorrow. Alcohol and drugs are two main forms of addictions.

Needless to say; there are many recognizable addictions in society today. These addictions are overlooked; such as a person who works non-stop over 40 hours a week; a 'workaholic.' A workaholic may work because they may truly love their job or the workplace is the only place they're busy and being busy distracts their painful memories of the past hurts and traumatic events.

Drinking excessive amounts of coffee or tea throughout the day can be addictive also. Sure, it gives people a relaxed feeling and can help them focus better. This mindset is somewhat good for the company but, anything done excessively is not healthy for the mind or the body.

I am not an expert. However, I have life experiences in addictive behavior. Before I was incarcerated I liked

drinking. Drinking was my time to relax after a hard day of working. Shopping online stores like Amazon and buying items just because it is on sale, or you just had the desire to purchase the items is an addictive behavior too.

An outcome we were not expecting to happen in our life happens and the result of the experience has left us in a state of anger or pain. The feeling of rejection will lead us into a state of depression and this emotion will give a false acceptance for our addictive mentally to take over our minds.

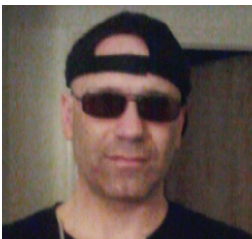
The months of November, December, and January saddens me. I desire to be around my family and friends, listening to them laugh and talk about daddy, competing with mama about who could cook the best. I am unable to hear the conversations of family and friends, because I am away from loved ones.

We have to be mindful in how we handle our daily stress. Assisting each other throughout the year lifts the spirit and brings joy and laughter to others.

Remember, anything we do excessively is an addiction. Understanding our stress levels and triggers and seeking healthy outlets is a step in the right direction. In addition, talking to a friend, who is trustworthy, is helpful. If trusting someone is hard to do, start a journal and write down thoughts of recovery. When you write your vision down on paper, you're able to see your thoughts and goals clearly and one day you can look back and say that goal come to pass.

These steps are great tools in getting back to our true selves. These steps; can be shared with your loved one who is struggling with an addiction. The best way to handle a situation concerning a loved one, who is an addict, is to research different ways to approach him or her so they may be open to positive suggestions. In addition, show them love by giving eye contact, hugs, and a loving smile.

Let us not allow the New Year to stress us out. Embrace 2024 with a big mug of hot chocolate and a big smile towards the family member who struggles with an addictive behavior. Make time for them, this will show them you care in spite of their addiction.



PRISON STORE PRICES NULLIFY JOB RAISES

By Efrain Pedro Morales, Jr.

There was a time when I was incarcerated, I had no money and was barely surviving on what I'd like to call slop meals, provided by the Connecticut prison I was housed in. I witnessed the desperation of what in free-world society many take for granted, food. Even when I finally got a prison worker job, I could only afford the bare necessities, like dental and body hygiene products. By the end of the night, my stomach would grumble, causing a loss of sleep.

A friend and fellow author, Leslie Williams, who's incarcerated in a Connecticut prison facility, claims that the Connecticut Department of Corrections (D.O.C) has finally given low paid Level 1 inmate workers raises (from .75 cents/day to \$1.00/day). He was at first excited since he can now afford a little more food, until Commissary (in-prison food store) item prices increased as well--NATIONWIDE, inclusive of additional tax on items that experts say, is the form of unregulated markups that tack on as much as 66% of the price. (<https://www.usatoday.com>, Alex Arriaga, The Marshall Project, May 2, 2023).

Some would think, that the late-in-coming raise will ease the burden on inmates wishing to afford to maintain a measure of health and longevity, considering the mostly unhealthy meals provided by the D.O.C.

Mr. Williams explains that there are many more inmates without jobs since there are more inmates than available job opportunities. "Some incarcerated don't even have any family, friends, or those who care enough to send money."

Then there are those that are too old to work and/or live with medical complications that prevent them from affording to maintain health and longevity, especially since the rationed meals, provided by D.O.C. are meant to spare taxpayer money with sub-par foods.

Interestingly, "*The typical prison diet, which is high in*

salt, sugar, and refined carbohydrates, contributes to the elevated rates of diabetes and heart disease among the incarcerated population. People, whom are incarcerated in the U.S., are also six times more likely to contract a food borne illness than the general population." (<https://www.aclu.org>).

Moreover, the consumption, of these sub-par foods is viewed as a stratagem of humiliation. "*Not only is the food generally unappetizing, it's also a source of disgust and humiliation. Three out of four formerly incarcerated people we surveyed reported receiving trays with spoiled food (e.g., moldy bread, sour milk, rotten meat, slimy bagged salad mix, and canned or packed products years past their expiration...)*" (<https://impactjustice.org>).

This may seem trivial to some citizens harboring a punishment by whatever means necessary sentiment and to others like cruel and unusual punishment (See: <https://criernewsroom.com>). But no matter how you cut it, there's a set-in-stone methodology of how best to appease public outrage for crime. "*Even Corrections Officers described the food as "monotonous, poor quality and highly processed,"*" (<https://impactjustice.org>).

Commissary (the in-prison food, stuff, and misc. items store) charges a whopping fifty-two cents for a non-nutritious single Ramen soup, for example, which is overpriced compared to what they cost in places like Walmart, for instance.

Convolutedly, overpriced items are a prison standard for lack of outrage from free world citizens bent on curbing crime; while treatment that malnourishment serves to enrage and disgruntle otherwise reform able individuals. We should more than speculate if recent and past inmate-on-staff violence suggests a mental health problem stemming from nutrition deficit. Clearly, prisoners can see the forms of cruel and unusual punishments—especially where it hurts the most--a worker raise offset by increasing prices for

food items, and rationed meals that force the purchasing of exorbitantly priced commissary items.

Consequently, the bartering of sex for food, and borrowing from other inmates with little means to repay, likely violence, is what many inmates are left to resort to so they can maintain a full belly.

“Interestingly, poor nutrition can also play a role in violent and criminal behavior” (Inadequate Prison Food Linked to Bad behavior (ZOUKIS Consulting Group, Aug. 11, 2017, Christopher Zoukis. <https://federalcriminaldefenseattorney.com>). Growing research shows impact of poor nutrition on prison violence: “Jokes about prison food are hardly new, but emerging research shows that the poor nutrition common in prison diets can lead to increased incidences of violence and mental health problems” (April 28, 2023, by Joshua Strange , <https://sanquentinnews.com>).

It’s noteworthy to mention that *“For the poorest people in prison, it’s a struggle to access even basic necessities”* (<https://www.prisonpolicy.org>).

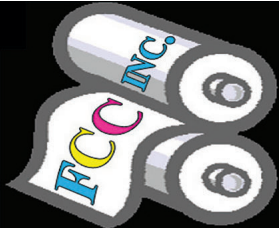
The question should be posed...Does society prefer malnourished and disgruntled inmates returning to

society or healthy individuals that will have the mental and physical capacity to establish a living conducive to society?

Society is nevertheless relentlessly intolerant of criminal behaviors, but society ought to also realize that “An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind” (Mahatma Gandhi). Moreover, some or all these reintegrated ex-convicts have been previously incarcerated and then released; with exacerbated mental illness; if any to begin with due to forms of cruel and unusual punishments, in Connecticut penitentiaries.

“A society should be judged not by how it treats its outstanding but by how it treats its criminals” (<https://www.goodreads.com>). Did not even the Messiah of the Bible, Jesus Christ say, “They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31–32).

In my estimation, even those that have erred in life deserve a lifeline as basic as providing better meals and Commissary prices that are proportionate to the worker pay increase.



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A PRISONER'S MIND

By Greg Ennis

Behind the electric fence and razor wire,
even after 25 years, I still remember
her beauty so real, so simple,
on the boulder aside a rushing river.

My mind reaches out and I am there.
The warmth of the sun; enhanced by a fragrance.
I remember the first time I smelt a pine tree.
Right there, in shackles and waist chains,
I cried; Yes! The mind is a powerful tool.

Unable to touch the noise of the quiet is real.
It is all tangible in the halls of my mind.
Through the eye gate, the ear and nose;
I've experienced nature; the beauty of its life
and death, and the renewing of life.
She is trapped as am I, in a prisoner's mind.



WOKE

By Steven McNinch

Sometimes I wake up
and stumble to my small window
Of the world's view
and think 'Damn, I'm still here.'
I see the world, not yours, but mine,
through tired eyes, frosted glass and
chain length fence.

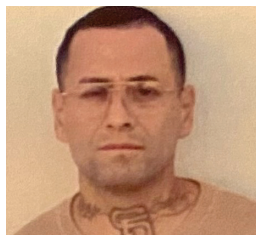
Then sometimes I wake up,
standing in this moment of self realization,
of all I have lost and the cost on my soul,
I think, can't they let it go?
I'm not that evil, they should let me leave!

That's what wakes me up,
to the facts that I've hurt, myself
you and them. Causing ongoing
waves that run through lives;
slicing pieces of souls and humanity
from people who one day may wake up.

Sometimes when I wake up,
I roll over to stretch my aching thoughts
and no drive to move my will back to life,
So, I cry and let the wet
be a comfort to my normal dry,
exhaustedly I drift off to sleep,
But....
sometimes, I wake up!



SUPPORT IS NEVER TOO FAR AWAY



THE FIRST FOR EVERYTHING

By Juanmingo Becerra

Getting over your first love can be difficult. It draws your best self, out, for the first time ever. It opens your heart, mind, and sensation on a whole, higher level. It's not to say it was your best ever, although it was the first ever; you were emotionally exposed, at best.

For these emotional trials and errors, you learned much about yourself. From the thoughts and feelings, you mastered the art of being your own emotional

teacher and spiritual student. Transforming heartaches into lessons, which then developed a heart to rule with toughness and have the discipline of an open-mind. Thus, this teaches us that in another person, there can be your higher calling.

So, after what I've shared, I'll finish with this: In good faith and strength, search and guard your heart. But, be willing to find; your only and forever.



SPOTLIGHT ON RECOVERY HONORS BLACK HISTORY MONTH

in Black Films

WATCH FROM YOUR HOME PARTY ON



Green Book, starring Academy Winner Mahershala Ali Harriet, starring Academy Award Nominated Actress Cynthia Erivo Judas and the Black Messiah, starring Academy Award winner Daniel Kaluuya Cry Freedom, starring 2-time Academy Award Winner, Denzel Washington King Richard, starring Academy Award Winner Will Smith The Woman King, starring Academy Award Winner Viola Davis

THE RIGHT STUFF

By Shawn Younker



When I was nine years old, my mother would take me out on long and meandering road trips, just to see the sights, as it were, and point out the occasional landmark, milestone, and historical reference point. She often exaggerated the facts of these places; adding in her own twist of truth. Be it because she didn't actually know the real history, or because she sought to incite my young and overactive imagination, I can't honestly say, but those trips stand out in my memory as a crucial turning point, for it was then that I began to realize just how deep and mysterious the world might actually be. And, for a boy of nine, who hadn't yet begun to grasp the possibility that Bigger Things could very well be happening beyond the border of his small town, this revelation was downright fascinating. Who were all these other people out there on the distant reaches, and what strange customs might they reveal?

In retrospect, I think that was my mother's way of exposing me to an early version of culture, for she would always direct my attention more fervently to the nuances of people than she would the rambling institutes and architecture. The jobs people held were consistently a focal point, along with the

broad spectrum separating wealth from poverty. At certain intervals, we took notice of the homeless, the downtrodden, and many other seedy establishments, which no doubt catered to the criminal element. Coupled with her dark and terrifying embellishments some of these avenues inevitably found their way into my nightmares for years afterward. Conjuring more than a few late-night episodes and in the end, prompted me to seriously, reconsider, the ramifications of landing on Santa's naughty list.

All jokes aside, I do believe her intentions were good, and no day will ever dawn when I might resent my childhood or scorn my mother. With no father in the picture, she did the best she could at instilling decency, fortitude, and moral fiber. Not the most well-spoken, or articulate, my mother would recognize those attributes, and characteristics in some unsuspecting person, quietly point them out to me, and whisper insistently into my young ear; "See there? He has the right stuff." Which may have been true, whatever the right stuff was, I gradually ascertained that these values and core ethics were models I needed to have, if only to stay out of the uglier places in this world and not end up on anyone's naughty list. And, with a careful glance

back at the evidence, I'd say I did fairly well, present circumstances excluded.

A prison sentence grants us all ample time to reflect on the course of our lives, the mistakes we've made, and what changes need to be implemented in order to avoid future missteps. I don't believe that an individual's crime, or the often harsh and excessive sentence they are given, in any way characterizes who they are as a person, fundamentally, or represents what their core beliefs might entail, for a prison sentence is merely the consequence of one mistake that person made, be it intentional or otherwise.

Sometimes we might happen across people in these dreary halls and wonder what 'stuff' their mother's taught them, but it is within our hearts that we know most people are good and subconsciously want to do the right thing.

Looking back, I remember one of those late afternoon road trips in which we passed a State Penitentiary, the sinister razor wire and cold hard stone buttresses seemingly like some sort of alien stronghold to my

younger self. I dared to ask; "What is that place over there, ma?" To which, she replied, "It is a prison, Shawn. That is where grownups go when they misbehave."

I remember this because her careful choice of words might have affected my life for what they did not imply, as opposed to what she meant at the time. For instance, she did not say, 'That is where bad people go,' or 'That is where monsters end up,' or 'That is what happens when the world hates you.' She did not say that because it is not fundamentally true. Nevertheless, I couldn't help thinking at the time, how many of those people ended up there because they didn't have the right stuff?

Speaking for myself, I know my mother would be pleased to see that these bleak and demeaning walls have not compromised my core values; my integrity or who I am, as a person -- which is all anyone can really ask, when it comes right down to it.

Don't let your mistakes define you, for they are only mistakes, never a depiction of your true self.

MAKING IT OUT ALIVE

By Deante Clay

We can't get out of this life alive, no one ever has and no one ever will. We're all going to die from the earth at some point in our lives. Don't you agree? So then where is the sense in us always trying to 'play it safe?'

We are always, by habit, constantly setting limits for ourselves (and sometimes others), on top of the many limits we continue to sheepishly accept from the conformity of this world. The greatest of this planet's legends and pioneers have never played it safe, they instead shattered their imposed limitations and recreated their own world, and as a result, they directly reconstructed our entire world of perception in so many creative ways.

They did not trouble themselves with the comforts of 'security' because life is about imagining and creating and then recreating again, and again. What is security, but a real crutch, to real progress.

Today, I listened to a motivational podcast and the speaker said that "The richest people in business were

the biggest spenders, the biggest investors. They do not trouble themselves with simply building security or what they're losing in money because they're investing in their own values, which in turn automatically grants them the greatest and most immeasurable levels of a much more meaningful form of security."

Do we not realize that the greatest security is found at a Maximum Security prison? Is that what we want for ourselves, and for our beautiful world, to live life in a self-made Maximum Security prison, firmly situated in our own minds? Because that's what we get if we keep trying to get out of this life alive, by always playing it safe.

The soul of man shouldn't conform to the temporary form of a man, the temporary form of man (the physical body) should strive to confront the soul of man. We cannot get out of life alive. So, we can either die in the bleachers or on the field. The choice is always ultimately our own to be made.

HOME???

By Bob R. Williams, Jr.

Oftentimes we incarcerated folk get to talking amongst one another about these places we refer to as “Home.” When we do, we all too often, use the name of some state, city, town, or neighborhood; sometimes even a street as a descriptor of our home. Yet, in thinking about these places, I’ve begun to wonder,...HOME,... what is it?

In my case, if after these 29 years of imprisonment, all on California’s Death Row; where I saw only one man actually go home, can a place like Bakersfield where I lived at the time of my arrest be home? Can the emerald hills of Virginia where I once lived; or my childhood home down in Bossier City, Louisiana where my Aunt still resides, can these places be home?

The harsh reality is that if I went back to any of the above places right now, I would be completely lost and totally confounded. They’ve all changed so much and my memories have faded. I’ve seen pictures of that old house in Louisiana...the clapboard sides are gone and the big trees are gone from the front yard. The inside still looks the same; even the pictures haven’t been changed.

Mamau, Palau and Big Mamau are gone, leaving my Aunt and a preschool teacher to live there, folks I barely know and remember. Don’t get me wrong, it is still home in a significantly small way, however. But,... it really isn’t...Home.

You see, time...decades of intensive thought has led me to come to the realization that home really isn’t a place. Because, if you go back there after all this time, you’ll most likely be lost due to a lack of people who you know and who know you.

So, what the heck is “Home,” then?

The wise ones say, “Home is where the heart is” because your heart surely isn’t in some ratty apartment, run down double wide, or in the Projects. It isn’t in some

liberal village, conservative town, or Democrat rum city, nor is it in some little black dot on the map either.

It’s wherever you go, no matter the town, city or state, where your loved ones are. Your heart is in PEOPLE!!!

It’s in the people you love and have grown to cherish. It’s wrapped up in family already there, or in the family you’ll create. It’s where you place your cares, hopes, dreams and visions, and your deepest loves.

Home is where your friends and family reside, where “your people” are. It’s where you are seen as You, as the You, whom you really are, where you are accepted as who you’ve become with open arms and loving care, where warm hearts embrace. It’s the place you end up and eventually find all the above, get all comfy and stuff.

Then, one day, realize that, “Danged if I ain’t Home!”

So, when you sit there thinking of home, or think of going home, don’t think of someplace, U.S.A. where you lived or may go to live. Think instead, of home as all them living, breathing, vibrantly alive and precious PEOPLE who will support, accept and love you. Because, truly, that place, where all them folks are, can only be, and must be...HOME Sweet HOME.





GRANDPA AND GRANDMA: CAN YOU HEAR ME?

By Dominique Carson

“I wish Heaven had visiting hours so I could chat with my grandparents weekly. I want to seek counsel from them or hug and kiss them.” – Dominique Carson

November 13, 2023, was the eleventh anniversary of my grandfather’s death. The holidays are bittersweet because he and my grandmother are no longer in the physical realm. This specific day is still heartbreaking because he was deceased two weeks before Thanksgiving and a week before his birthday. It was a tough day because I thought about my grandfather’s counsel and a witty sense of humor. My heart was filled with despair because I wanted him to be a part of my life, now that I’m in my 30s, accomplishing many goals we’ve discussed since I was a teenager.

Despite my heart-wrenching feelings, I found out via email that I was the winner of the 2023 Global Recognition Award. As soon as I read this email, I envisioned my grandfather saying, “That’s my Nicky Nack or Go Ahead Champ.”

Gramps was very hands-on in my life, when I had my heart-to-heart conversations with him, these were some of the topics we touched on; and I made sure that I prevented any unnecessary distractions that would try to interfere with my mission and purpose. One of my fondest memories of my Gramps was when I was ten-years old, and he asked me to look in three mirrors after I was molested a year and a half before. He said, “Nicky Nack, come in here; I want to show you something and asked me to sit in front of the mirror. After I sat in front of the mirror, he said the simplest but meaningful words: “Don’t blame yourself; it’s not your fault; you see that little girl in the mirror? Don’t EVER forget your value and worth. Do not use this situation as a crutch or let it stop you from doing and being your best.”

When my Gramps said those words, I started crying immediately because I was still having bad nightmares from the incident, so his remarks were smooth to my soul. At that moment, my heart rested and reassured me that I would be okay and a lot stronger than in

this situation. He also encouraged me to attend Edward R. Murrow High School, one of the most prestigious high schools in New York City. While eating breakfast at my grandparent’s house on a Saturday morning, Gramps recognized the importance of being challenged, especially since I was always a studious kid in school. He would say, “Nicky Nack, you’re too bright to go to one of these zone schools in Brooklyn, apply to Edward R. Murrow. They have an excellent communications arts program.” I trusted his judgment, and it turned out that he was right. Murrow changed my life as a student and prepared me to think more critically as a college student. As an adolescent; it was the best decision I ever made.

I wish Heaven had visiting hours so I could chat with my grandparents weekly. I want to seek counsel from them or hug and kiss them. I miss my grandmother’s casserole, fried fish, salad, and oxtails. I miss my heart-to-heart conversations with my grandfather or his comedic attitude about life. My grandparents, Eloise and Richard Grant, have been a central component in my life since day one and when God called them home, my heart was filled with so, much anguish and heartache. Their deaths were one of the hardest things I had to deal with in my life thus far.

I knew when I lost both of them within a short time, and I knew my faith was being tested because two essential people in my life had succumbed. My grandfather died when I started graduate school, and 13 months later, my grandmother passed on. I had already processed the fact that I lost my grandfather, and my grandmother was around the corner. I was finishing my master’s degree when she passed, but her death hit me harder.

I still have good and bad days a decade later, especially since my grandmother passed away four days before Christmas. Around this time, a part of me would always feel like something was obsolete because she was the

nucleus of our family. She was the “go-to” person for several family members, whether it was shelter, wisdom, conversation, or her tough love. My relationship with my grandparents was not the standard “grandparent relationship,” because I enjoyed their company. Their personalities were oil and vinegar, but they had one thing in common: their love and admiration for me, and my siblings.

I think of them each time I see their middle names on my right wrist. Grandma and Gramps, I am saying, “Thank You, Thank You for everything,” and I am screaming it to the heavenly skies. Grandma and Gramps, I know I have much more to do, so stay tuned!

They were among the many people who shaped my future, and I must keep moving. With this frame of mind, I know they are always with me, and I can climb to the top. My overall relationship with my grandparents reminded me to embrace the Italian phrase, “Fare del proprio meglio,” meaning to do one’s best. The phrase exemplifies what my grandparents instilled in me as my voice of reason or that special reassurance in my life.

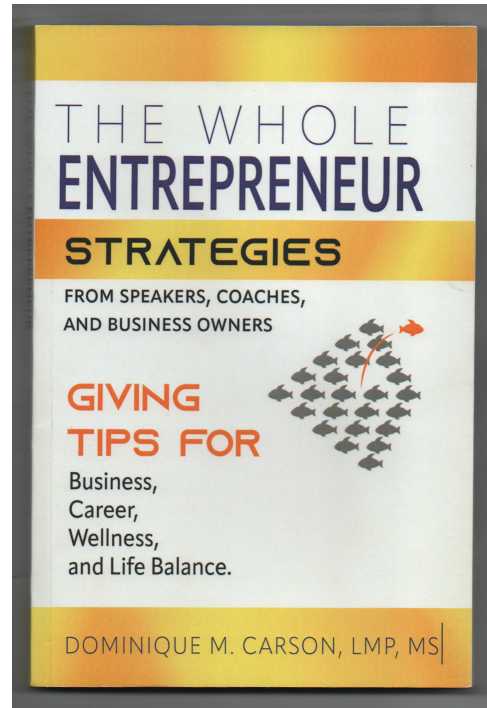


HE WAS THERE, EVEN AT THE BOTTOM OF THE BOTTLE

By Paulette Kengg

As the youngest of five kids, I grew up with two alcoholics in a small home; where secrets, were created and never shared with anyone, including each other. Plenty of yelling, images of my dad trying to strangle my mom with my siblings, and I scampering about on the floor, crying. How many times did one of our uncles faithfully come in the middle of the night to rescue us by bringing us to his home, where our cousins had to let us sleep with them – again?

Of the two parents, my dad was the one who loved me. The pressure was on my mom to produce a son, so after three girls, a son was finally born. The last thing my mom wanted was another kid, yet here I came. Looking back today as a wife, mother and grandmother myself, I don’t blame her a bit for not wanting anything to do with me. The poor woman was exhausted and abused



“The Whole Entrepreneur” is a collaborative book that brings together a wealth of knowledge and experience from successful entrepreneurs, coaches, and business owners.
www.DominiqueCarson.Contently.com

on a regular basis, with no one to talk to.

The first time I drank alcohol was the night one of my uncles shot and killed my dad while in a drunken rage. I was given Jack Daniels, and coke that night by my oldest sister, who picked me up to get away from it all. This was all she knew to do because it was all we were ever shown.

I was a “normal drinker” for most of my life, even though there were periods here and there of heavy drinking.

Shortly after my mom passed away, I landed the ‘job of my dreams’ as a regional editor of a healthcare magazine. Thankfully, my mom and I reconciled our relationship and had a few good years together before

she lost her life tragically and unnecessarily at the hands of others.

My new boss was elated and was a big boost to my ego. Part of my job was developing story ideas - something I am good at and it was a job I loved.

Enter the most unwelcome insomnia, which consumed me for the next almost 10 years. During this time, I met a wonderful man who became my third and final husband. Unfortunately, after we married and I moved in with him, I discovered he had a very bad snoring problem. This was not good for anyone, especially not for someone with insomnia.

I ran into an old friend and we had dinner. She suggested I have a glass of wine to help me fall asleep. Never did it ever occur to me to use alcohol for the drug that it is, to help me fall asleep. I decided it couldn't hurt anything (because I'd never had a problem with alcohol before).

Almost instantly - I can safely say within a week - my brain became addicted to alcohol. I'd wake up after a few hours and pour another glass - much like taking another aspirin or OTC medicine. Repeat several times. It wasn't long before I was drinking an entire bottle a night, sometimes two.

I hid the empty bottles in my rain boots or under my pillow. When he left for work, I'd put the empty bottles into a plastic shopping bag and rush to the store, throw them away in the store's trash bin outside before going in to buy replacement bottles.

Once I developed a tolerance, I began drinking hard whiskey, no ice, no coke, just whiskey. At 2 am, 5 am, 8-9 am, 1-2 pm and so on while he was at work. Repeat over and over the process of now going to different liquor stores.

I tried AA several times but it never helped, in spite of it being a popular program. God created us differently and not all programs resonate with everyone. I refused to label myself or believe I had a chronic disease that only I could diagnose, which is what we're told by doctors. I began reading loads of books about addiction and recovery, listening to podcasts and took several online courses. While my periods of wellness (a/k/a



sobriety) were getting longer and longer, I was still so hard on myself when I would pick up a drink. Honestly I began worrying about my mental health because while I wasn't suicidal, let's just say I hated waking up to another miserable 'groundhog day'.

Eventually, I was treated by a team of three doctors simultaneously for 1.5 years for my insomnia: a board-certified sleep specialist, a cognitive behavior therapist specializing in insomnia, and my primary care physician. Together we cracked the code of my insane sleep-deprived brain, so alcohol was no longer the solution, but it sure was the bigger problem of the two, at this point.

My husband was very supportive of me throughout this period, even though he didn't understand why I just couldn't stop drinking. I tried many forms of therapy and counseling, all of which were immensely helpful. Unfortunately, the first place I always thought I should have been able to go to was the last place I went to: our church.

When I confessed my problem to one of my dear pastor friends, he said he'd been "clean and sober for 20 years now." The relief and no longer feeling ashamed was palpable. He put me in touch with a Biblical counselor friend who I worked with for over a year. "The Heart of Addiction" by Mark E. Shaw and his accompanying workbook showed me the real root of my problems.

God gave me the gift of repentance and healed me one unique step at a time.

Today I'm living my best life and I feel amazing. I never planned to write a book about my experiences and all I learned from doing research, but it happened anyway and it came into the world quite quickly, after just about two months.

My sleep problems have been resolved, I've learned how to manage my emotions without numbing and spend my time helping others in recovery through my Spirit-Filled Sobriety Facebook group, blog posts

and just making myself available in whatever ways the needs present each day.

My advice to anyone struggling with alcohol would be to surrender to God and let him lead you, even if your path looks different from others. He created each of us as unique people with different gifts, abilities, and experiences, so our paths aren't meant to be the same.

Getting well (a/k/a sober) is the hardest thing I've ever done in my life, and I'm as grateful and as happy as I can be. If you need help, ask and never give up on yourself. You're worth it, and life is so much better on the other side.



NIGHTMARES, SLEEP FEARS, INSOMNIA AND POTENTIAL HELP

By Lee Malis

I am a victim; of a malady which seems impossible to cure. Nearly one third of a normal human being's life is spent in the peaceful, tranquility of sleep. In my case, this fraction has been sliced to the point of panic. In the past, I looked forward to restful shuteye, which was generally as easy breathing oxygen. Then, at around age sixty, nightmares increased and terrorized my sleep. I am now sixty-seven.

As my nightmares grew more frightening, I feared falling asleep. As these problems continued over the years, insomnia resulted. In the last three years, just the thought of experiencing another nightmare has tortured me at bedtime. I was losing two to five hours of sleep nearly every night.

Six years ago, a doctor suggested that I seek a mental health professional to find a cure. Several years before this, I had a few sessions with a psychiatrist who suggested that therapy could last my lifetime. I considered it, but the high cost and what I perceived to be endless, frustrating sessions; I terminated the plan. In my opinion, psychobabble is how I view psychiatric treatment, based on reading a few essays and a book on the subject, hence no relevance for my sleep disorders.



There is an assumption, which many people believe that seldom applies to me. It is if a person experiences a good day, then their dream that night will be good. If a person has a bad day, then their dream will be bad. In my case, the reverse is true about 60% of the time. I do have my share of pleasant daily moments and wish my dreams would mirror them more than they do. This pattern has changed in recent months.

Exploring my nightmares:

In my first nightmare, I was in a hospital waiting room. People were gathered near a door observing a woman's mangled body. I glanced at the body which appeared to be sliced in several pieces. The body morphed into a hospital nurse delivering a lecture to the frightened people.

I continued having nightmares, some worse than the first.

Sleep Fears:

A factor in my sleep fears is that even though half of my nightmares are colorless, they are extremely vivid in that I can make out the smallest details of people and objects, which makes me panic at bedtime.

Another sleep fear is that some characters in my nightmare are real people in my life. I've had mostly bad experiences with these individuals in the past and or present time. They have invaded my sleep and I'm unable to make them go away.

I am constantly frustrated, by the knowledge that these nightmares can slither into my sleep. I struggle with my will power every night to try to stop them, but still fail.

How this all leads to Insomnia.

A huge factor in my battle with insomnia is like a sleep fear which is, again if I have a thought of experiencing a nightmare at bedtime, then of course, I'll be afraid to fall asleep. Even when I'm not afraid of experiencing a nightmare or I'm totally exhausted, it could still take me an hour to get to sleep. This occurs despite my preparation for sleep, which strives for feeling secure in the bed, as my eyes become a few ounces heavier.

I've read several essays on insomnia by supposedly learned professional. The advice gives some relief, but not enough. For instance, the benefits of over-the-counter and prescription sleeping pills; I've tried all of the during separate time periods. I was always faithful in following the instructions for each drug. I maintained a high respect for the danger of overdosing. After short spans of normal sleep, each drug failed.

I have taken to heart other advice from sleep disorder professionals. I do not smoke cigarettes and am a moderate drinker of alcohol. For a 67 year old man, I am in good physical condition per my vital readings. Insomnia does not appear to restrict my daily activities of exercise and leisure, at least so far. This is par for what the experts suggest. Despite these facts, my insomnia hangs around.

My struggle for a good night's sleep is comparable to the ancient legend of Sisyphus. He was compelled to push a stone to the top of a hill repeatedly, only to have it fall back down again.

Many people suffer from and continue to seek the elusive potential help for insomnia, which leads me to the fourth topic of this article, potential help.

This first potential help is physical exercise, which has been pointed out; in several published, essays I have read. I admit that at 67 years old, I don't exercise nearly as much as I did decades ago. Running is the exercise I engage in more than any other exercise. I run the equivalent of around five city blocks, almost every day, mostly in the quiet confines of my three-bedroom apartment; this is scheduled five hours before bedtime. I believe that on some nights, especially during this last month, it tires me just enough that I can claim seven hours of sleep. Sometimes nightly wind sprints have also helped in this regard. I climb 15 stories on a stairway then I hustle all the way back down, once a day in my building. Calisthenics and Isometrics daily may be beneficial as well.

Reading and writing are effective on some nights in assisting me to a good night's sleep. I read fiction and non-fiction concerning subjects of a pleasant nature just before bedtime. I write both fiction and non-fiction articles, and have been published several times. Knowing that I am a paid professional writer has lifted

my confidence level, which in turn has been a catalyst for sleep. I write my journal before bedtime, which also helps. My reading occasionally assists in relieving any late- night tension; which can be useful for sleep.

I mentioned alcohol before; in the last few months, I've realized that having no more than two drinks three hours before bedtime has relaxed me some nights where I'm not afraid to fall asleep for fear of a nightmare and I slept well.

Another helpful practice involves eating timetables. I have abstained from eating meals or snacks a few hours before bedtime. Sleep disorder experts have written that if anyone eats during this period, it might cause nightmares and if done regularly, it can begin or sustain insomnia.

A glass of warm milk consumed a half hour before bedtime periodically induces sound sleep. I avoid anti-depressant drugs because, according to case studies and my own experience, nightmares can and do occur if these drugs are taken.

The bedroom can be altered to make it more conducive for restful shuteye. It should be kept neat, dark, and quiet. Do not work in it if possible. The reasoning is work is active in nature, which requires energy, but your thoughts at bedtime remind you of this when instead your thoughts should be those that create relaxation.

A problem for me and other insomniacs is that we tend to stay in bed, not sleeping, much longer than we

should. Sleep disorder professionals advise the insomniac to shorten the time in bed unable to sleep. If I'm still awake after about 20 minutes, I get up and simply sit on my soft rocking chair, then close my eyes. When I feel more tired, I go back to bed. I'm able to fall asleep around three out of four times this way.

I refuse to allow my personal problems to bother me thirty minutes before bedtime, which I believe will assist my quest for sleep. The insomniac should not check the time repeatedly while in bed, since it results in frustration from not being able to sleep as the minutes expire. I was slow in terminating this bad habit because I believed chastising myself for remaining awake might help me achieve sleep as time would waste away.

I enjoy quiet classical music, so I turn on the radio. A few sleep disorder essays I've read point out that this music can produce sleepers.

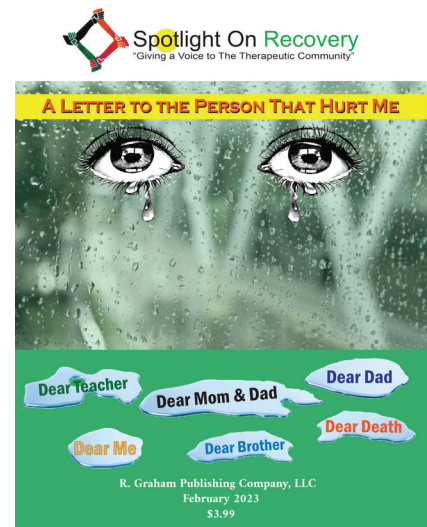
I haven't forgotten the friend of my head; a pillow. I believe my pillow is the real sandman. I consciously caress my pillow and roll my head to, and fro over it. I realized my past troubled life has led me to believe the grim reaper is in my night bed; not to kill, but to torture me with frightening nightmares. These images and sounds convinced me these are my real conscious life as I am behind the bars of their prison.

Fortunately, in the new year of 2024, I understand the Roma (Gypsy) belief that the death of a winter snowflake offers life to a spring leaf. I know my nightmares will die. (Zzz z- Safe, Restful Sleep)

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Is looking for volunteer Pen Pals



Dear Prospective PenPal Volunteer:

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- Jeff's Second Family PenPal Ministry is open to all prisoners and welcomes Pen Pal volunteers from every walk of life who want to make a difference.
- Our mission is to share respectful correspondence, stories, and true friendships with those who are incarcerated and to give inmates a connection to society beyond prison walls.
- If you would like to proceed, please e-mail me back to receive the Information Sheet. You must be 18 years old to participate. My e-mail is rholley58@aol.com
- Once I receive your email back, I will send you the Information Sheet along with a few Inmate Request letters. You can review these letters and decide if and with whom you would like to correspond.

Please let me know if you have any additional questions.

Thanks, and Blessings,

Richard Holley

WE GOT YOU!

CRUDE CREATURES

By Leo Cardez

*“In Italy, for 30 years under the Borgias,
they had warfare, terror, murder, and bloodshed,
but they produced Michelangelo,
Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance.
In Switzerland, they had brotherly love,
they had 500 years of democracy and peace, and
what did that produce? The cuckoo clock.”*

– Orson Welles says, as Harry Lime in The Third Man

“I didn’t know there were that many prison writers. Why do you think you guys like to write so much?” My mom asks during a recent visit. I tell her about some of my favorite authors that did time, Dostoevsky, who at 28 was arrested for sharing controversial political views, placed in front of a firing squad, then sent to a labor camp in Siberia or William Sidney Porter, better known as O. Henry, who wrote fourteen stories in prison; but that didn’t answer her question. We soon pivoted to another topic.

Truth is, I don’t know why so many inmates are driven to the page, even if I did, I doubt I could fully express that gentle tug that demands to be heard.

Unlike most prison hustles, inmate writers don’t write for the money. I’d like to think we write because we feel it can lead to something deeper. I’ve always believed within every prisoner, there is a story; desperate to be told. There is a desire, to express something about ourselves and our world, through the lens of our own creativity.

Maybe we write because we have something to say and dare to believe we have the right to express it, like Wole Soyinka, who wrote “The Man Died” in a Nigerian prison with Nescafe for ink, and a chicken bone for a stylus.

Unlike Oscar Wilde, who entered prison as an accomplished playwright, (“The Importance of Being Earnest” e.g.) most prison writers do not enter prison as writers, nor have we ever considered writing, not really. The dark magic of these walls, capable of taking so much from a person, sometimes, help us find the power of the written word.

In my case, a few letters from loved ones encouraged me to put pen to paper. Soon, my musings end up in prison publications, then larger, more mainstream magazines. But, every prison writer has their own journey.

Oscar Wilde wrote about his struggles while incarcerated; how the enforced silence and sameness of prison life degraded his body and mind. It’s only after a sympathetic warden permits him pen and paper he begins tutoring a guard in literature through “extensive written answers on sheets of foolscap” passed under his cell door every morning, does he return to writing. Later in life, he uses his prison experience for his narrative poem, “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” one of his most successful books.

Every inmate writer will encounter challenges along the way. Typewriters, if available at all, can cost over \$400.00, a small fortune when you make less than a dollar a day scrubbing toilets. Finding time and quiet spaces in a place that thrives on constant chaos is near impossible. Not to mention, unfriendly prison regulations, and administrations hell bent on muffling our voices. But, for those rare moments when the stars align and we find ourselves lost on the page...well, for me, I am free. That’s a high no amount of poetry, can convey.

Few things in my life give me that feeling of purpose, that sense of value. I lived most of my life on autopilot, cruise control from one feel-good experience to the next without ever, really feeling anything at all. My life lacked that something that made life worth living; I had to come to the fringes of society to find what I had been lacking. Irony...table for one.

I think of other inmate writers like Nelson Mandela, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr.; did they create something all their own, simply as an outlet; a moment of internal privacy, and reflection that only they could appreciate; or was their work driven by their desire to reach others? I believe truly, touching another is a writer's highest honor. I can't fathom the feeling of knowing my words make their way over these walls and touch the heart and mind of even just one person; just one. There are no words big enough.

Most of today's inmate writers fall into one of two camps.

1. Those like John J. Lennon and Kwanneta Harris, who dared to expose themselves in the process, risking their own well-being. Mr. Lennon writes about the backlash from a piece he wrote for Sports Illustrated, about gambling in prison for Esquire magazine that eventually led to a stint in the 'Hole' and transfer to another prison.

These inmate journalists/memoirists hybrids push boundaries with their willingness to expose the hypocrisy of our penal system or shed light in the deepest recesses of our tortured souls.

2. Like Saint James Harris Wood, and Reginald Dwayne Betts, whose creative writing demonstrated the human capacity for growth and hope in even the most dreary existence. They taught us, that hope equals a certain type of freedom; that is not dictated by where you live.



The middle finger to all those who try to dehumanize and bury us under social stigmas. (Modern day William Reich, George Jackson, Alexandre Dumas, and Victor Hugo's; all of whom were also behind bars.)

So, how would I answer my mother's question? I guess I would say that there's a million reasons we write. Most of us write, whether anyone cares or reads us, and whether it costs us financially or figuratively.

Personally, writing is how I make sense of the world. It's the silent and brave act of exposing my greatest fears and in the process feeding my spirit. It is the magic potion that allows me to be my truest self; warts, and all; warts, especially. It is what I can give to the world. I don't want to go all woo-woo on you, or maybe I do. I'm in a rare flow, the words coming naturally. I write because I want others to understand, because I want to understand. I write because I miss personal connections and am desperate to feel as if I still matter. I write to justify living, even if I don't make a living out of it.

I'm not making money, and no one is attending my readings, but that voice inside me that demands to be heard, is alive and well. Prison, is capable of taking so much from us; more than we ever imagined possible. If we can somehow find a way to express ourselves, to keep something pure and beautiful living inside of us; what better life is there than that?

And finally, I leave my fellow writers with these final messages:

When they say, 'you're just wasting your time,' remember, John Lennon's quote, "Time that you enjoy wasting, was not wasted."

When you're scared to open the vault for fear of what you may find, remember that Jim Morrison said, "Expose yourself to your deepest fear; after that, fear has no power. You are free."

When you question yourself, remember Jimmy Page's words, "I may not believe in myself, but I believe in what I'm doing."

When the haters show up (and they will) remember Kurt Cobain once said, "I'd rather be hated for who I am, than loved for who I am not."

When you think everything will be better and easier once you're free, remember Bob Dylan's message, "No one is free, even the birds are chained to the sky."

So, keep writing, keep submitting, who knows, you could be the next Miguel De Cervantes, Antonio Gramsci, Aleksandr I. Sozhenitsyn, Leo Tolstoy, Mahatma Gandhi, Eldridge Cleaver, Jack Long, don Pearce, or Edward Bunker – all successful ex-convict writers.

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IT'S NOT TOO LATE, TO TAKE LIFE SERIOUSLY

By Lamar Moore

“Young men, go to work instead of being in the streets because the only ending is in prison or with your face, on a t-shirt saying, R.I.P”

In today's time, as a young man and father in prison, I think about how so many of us here are failed fathers. I'm sad for our children, because we made them and we leave them without a man to show them how life goes.

We don't truly grasp the concept of being a father; I mean we talk good among our peers on the recreation yard and in the barracks, and especially at our parole hearing, but we don't meant it.

My selfishness has led me to miss fifteen years of my daughter's life. She'll be twenty-eight years old when I'm free. But, many men younger than I still have a chance, but choose to stay in prison and play.

I am 31-years old, and I'll be 46-years old when I am free. I had to grow up in prison, because I didn't take life, parenting or the privilege of freedom seriously. I am filled with regret, as I lay on this bunk, not knowing what my daughter is doing; if she's safe, what her goals are or what type of person she is in general.

These younger en don' see the real meaning behind what this prison system means. These little kids think it's a game to be locked into a room with 50 men, 24/7. Guards cuss at them and they laugh as if it's funny. They get out, and kill somebody, then come back bragging; as if they achieved something.

Many of them can't spell or count, but they can tell you all about a rapper's song. All the while, our sons and daughters grow up alone, sometimes in bad environments. Some girls are kidnapped, raped or just constantly abused and they silently pray for their daddy to come and save them, but instead, we are all in prison. Many are inside these walls, having fun, fighting, drugging or many come to escape the responsibilities of the world.

I am ashamed that I've left my daughter to grow up under another man. I can only pray that she is safe and unharmed.

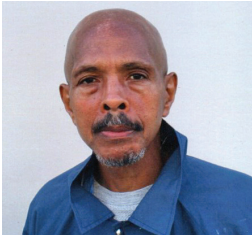
Men, we have to stop being blind and stop making children if we are not going to be in their lives. The only thing I wish I had is more time. My daughter will



be a grown woman, and may not need me by that time I come home. I can only pray she forgives me and if she has children, that I would be allowed in their lives. This life is real, and there are no take backs or start over's. This life we have; is all we get. Please show your kids you have them. Not with materialistic stuff, put in the time. I feel that if my parents would've been involved in my schooling coming up, that I would've been on another path.

Young men, go to work instead of being in the streets, because the only ending is in prison or with your face on a t-shirt, saying, “R.I.P.” This is something the rappers don't tell you.

You still have time. Make it count!



ANGER ISSUES: THERE'S HELP FOR THAT

By Edgar Hendricks

A lot of people have been confused with the interpretation of participating in an Anger Class because of the stereotyping nature of persons with mental disabilities. Anger, is a mental disorder that is treatable. There are those who use medication to control their anger or behavioral issues, which include mood-swings.

Anger class is a course to help people deal with anxiety, such as stress and mood-swings, which could trigger violence at any given time if not treated properly. A form of anxiety for instance could be stressing from daily live activities, such as work, financial debts, family matters, etc. For jail and prison inmates, anxiety could come from peer pressure, lack of movement, lack of correspondence with family or no correspondence at all, or from constant thoughts of freedom and life.

In all that is being mentioned in this article is for anyone in need of working through his or her anger, stress and mental health issues, seek professional help and realize how serious things could become if not treated in time.

There are things you can do in the meantime to reduce

stress; reading, exercising, arts and craft hobbies, etc. There are a lot of people who withhold personal information about these problems occurring in their life because of embarrassment and what other people will think. However, there is something that must be taken into serious consideration here, and that is these problems occur in everyone's life, from childhood to adulthood; no one is excused from "anxiety," but incapable of experiencing life's daily progressions.

Remember this! You are never alone in these matters. You may know someone who is always smiling when you see them, but that doesn't mean that inside everything is going okay in their life, regardless of their outer appearance.

To the wise; seek consolation to put your life back on course, because holding whatever you are experiencing inside can and will considerably worsen the matter or mattes you are experiencing in your mind. The "Heart Follows" the mind at what it seeks, not the opposite.

The last words of encouragement shall be and is; seek the help that you need to achieve peace of mind.



MY PURPOSE DRIVE LIFE

By Anthony Jones

I was 21-years old, newly coming to knowledge and I came across a little green book. It wasn't the name of the book that caught my attention. It wasn't the author's name and it especially wasn't the dull color of the cover, but something about this book grabbed at me. It was like some magnetic pull of my person.

The name of the book is My Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren. I recall telling an officer at the prison where I was housed that I was in a rush to get back to reading this book. When I told him the title, this usually stoic in demeanor individual became so animated, as he exclaimed, "Whew, Oh my God, that is a great book! We're reading that book in my book club right now! Ooooh, be sure to read that whole book. You're going to do so good in life!"

As I mentioned, prior to encountering this book, I was newly coming into knowledge and this book for me, was very instrumental in helping me fashion my life. My life up until that point was so chaotic. I thought the only logical way for me to obtain anything in life; have respect, was some type of trouble. Of course, we know where that landed me (in prison). I had hurt people who were only trying to help me.

What kind of a monster would do that?

I was that kind of monster. All deriving from that tough-guy role I had assumed. The irony of it though, upon coming into knowledge, I realized that this persona that I took on, actually made me "Weak," instead of tough. As one of the definitions of "weak," is

‘deficient in vigor of mind or character.’ The definition for weakling is, ‘a person who is physically, mentally, or morally weak.’

“Morally Weak”

Imagine that, incapable of being moral. Such a character trait; befitting a monster or a beast of sort, if you will. Because, not to have morals, is to not be Human!

To not be human is to have NO FEELINGS, to have NO RESPECT, NO COMPASSION, NO LOVE, for others. Therein, being under serving of all of these things; the very things that I myself always wanted.

How then, could I have lived like this, as a Monster?

No Feelings, as of concern; as to whether I was living right or not.

No Respect for people; as in knowing not to intrude on their boundaries

No Compassion; Not caring about other’s feelings.

No Love; not enough concern for people; to help them and be loyal to having Respect and Compassion at all times, for all people!

Then, and there, through my remorse for the wrong way I have been living and the people I had victimized in doing so, I had found my Purpose in Life! My purpose was what it has always been; to love and help people!

That’s why I was not blessed with ‘Privilege’ growing up, without proper love and help; so that I could become passionate about these things. Not to the extent of being bitter, for not having them and hurting others as I had, but passionate enough to actually understand their value, to relate to people deprived of them and work to help them. I not only had to recognize why I had been blessed with so many skills and talents in life; I had to apply them!

I have keen insight, a good memory, strong orator skills, and I’m a great story teller, all contributing to my talents; which includes, being a great writer. I now write books and have a children’s book and other projects in the works. I write intriguing articles and poetry that I enter into contests, such as Aesthetica Creative Writing Award for Poetry and Pen America’s Annual Prison Writing Contest for Poetry and Non-Fiction. I even help with consulting, marketing consulting for businesses, grant writing, and program organizing. I’m also a great debater and musically gifted. All of these skills, are only a shadow of what my capabilities are and upon release, I will use them all to help others.

When I speak of applying these skills and talents to help others, I mean to Help and Love our people; to understand our people, to console our people, to educate our people, to guide our people in the right direction and to simply speak to our people, and even speak up for our people. When I’m released, I will be more hands on and involved in social work, community development, prison reform, criminal justice reform and crime reduction.

To date, I’ve done exactly that; used my skills and talents to help people.

My Purpose in Life!

I’ve had several profound articles published in the wonderful therapeutic based magazine, Spotlight on Recovery from the blessed vision of its Founder and Publisher, the heavenly Robin Graham.

They include:

“The Effects of Long-term Solitary Confinement” in Writer’s Choice, 5, October 2022

“Movies with a Message,” my article on the film, Malcolm X from January 2023

“Dear Dad,” which appeared in A Letter to the Person Who Hurt Me, February 2023

“Unchecked Trauma” from the Unchecked Trauma issue of June 2023

All of these articles are powerful and are contributing to a dialogue that needs to be shared, because it’s the struggle of so many; looking for a safe place to speak about their pain, and for those in search of their purpose in life.

I have also made it my business to constantly work on myself; to ensure that I am appropriately prepared for the task at hand, which is me holding myself accountable for my every flaw and fault (that entailing past, present and future), because I understand that my accountability is the only way one can truly be redeemed.

As I addressed earlier, I have remorse for my past behaviors and actions. I also had to hold myself accountable to being forgiving of others, as I want to be forgiven. I have given my life to God, and all I simply care to do now is help people and spread love.

In the words of Rick Warren, the author of the aforementioned book, The Purpose Driven Life, “If you want your life to have impact; focus it!”



HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS?

By Monique Houston

“Success is not defined by your bank account balance, your career title, or your impressive possessions. Success, is defined by how deeply you love and are loved, how freely you give, and receive from others and how continuously you live in your passion. That is the new definition of success.” ~ Lisa Nichols

Success!

Success!

Success!

We all strive to be it, obtain it, live it. We all thrive to embody this thing called success. Many of us have our own definition of what success looks like to us.

We all have our own meaning of what success means to us. If I was to ask the question of what success means to a room filled with people? Everyone would have their own true meaning of what success means in their lives ~ everyone answers may not be the exact same. Although, I am in a room filled with beautiful, amazing women. I love hearing men opinions as to what something means to them. Today, I’ve gathered a few opinions from both male and females of the meaning of success. Some of these phenomenal men and women prefer to remain anonymous.

Here are some of the feedback from some of people that were asked to defined success:

- *Finding God and having a relationship with him. ~ P. Miller*
- *Something that you do that people will remember once you are no longer here ~ Cynthia*
- *“Success is being stable.” ~ Noble*
- *“Success would be actually accomplishing something real!” ~ Kimmy*
- *“Success is exceeding to where I am comfortable, stress free, my family and friends are okay. I am at peace with no strings attached.” ~ Murphy*
- *“Success is defined by having a dream job, and doing it well and having your family, That is success to me.” ~ S. Ellis*

- *“Success is your being. It’s what we embody. It’s your relationships and your pouring into each of them. Rather, spiritually, mentally, financially, socially ~ our success is gather up into how we all showing up in these areas of our lives.” ~ T. Starks*
- *Success is defined by your LIFESTYLE, not material things. ~ H. Estes *Success is not a material, it’s a mindset P. Diddy once said, “Getting a hit record once is one thing. But, getting a hit record over and over again, doing something again and again out of excellence is the true meaning of success.”*



There is no right or wrong answer as I asked this question. As mentioned earlier, we all have our own meaning of success.

However, Lisa Nichols quoted resonated so deeply within me for multiple reasons. But before we go further ~ let me share the quote again.

“Success is not defined by your bank account balance, your career title, or your impressive possessions. Success, is defined by how deeply you love, and are loved, how freely you give and receive from others, how continuously you live in your passion. That is the new definition of success. ~ Lisa Nichols

Recently, while talking to my 21 year old Tae who is far beyond his years. Although, I love to refer to him as by baby. Truth is, my baby is now a young man and our conversation makes this statement so true. As I listen to my son pour out on how he wants to be successful and the steps he has been taken to become the man he wants to be. Listening to my son tell me how he is building his character and the reason behind his clothing brand. For his motto is no one left behind. At 21 years old, my son knows importance of loyalty, love, family, friends, honesty, respect, and ensuring that no one is left behind. I could not be more proud to hear my son get the very thing of what most grown adults struggle with daily. All I can say is my baby got it.

Most people defined success in their possession. The material things, their fancy cars, fancy clothes - even more so, their bank accounts. Success; is really defined by our CHARACTER. How well are we showing up to our relationships? How well are you treating and fostering those relationships? How well do you love others? Are you a person, that gives freely or receive from others? Are you in a career that you are passionate about?

If we are operating out of authenticity, we will know and understand that success is not tied up into the accolades. It's not tied up in the next degree we get ~ the next book we write. Although, I am the author of B.B.U. an inspirational ~ motivational book for without B.B.U., I am still success. B.B.U. is a plus towards being able to do what I love, which is writing ~ while passionately helping young girls and women discover their worth. By doing this continuously I am embodying success.

Thank you, Lisa Nichols, for your continuous nuggets of wisdom that has called us to grow tremendously into our GREATNESS. By all means, may you continue to MOTIVATE THE MASSES.

I'll ask this question again, how do you define success. Remember, if your success is tied into your possession, bank account, accolades. Then, I suggest that maybe its time for some self - evaluation. Success is not defined by our paycheck, career, titles, or possessions.

Is your character rich or poor? Hear is a rich success story that I am honored to share with you all.

While listening to a Tony Ribbons podcast, it was an honor to be able to hear the secret recipe for famous Chik~fil~A. As Dan Cathy, Chik~ Fil~A has been rated number one for the eight times in the row for the best in hospitality. Yes, the iconic family owned fast food chain has definitely reached its peak of success. Let's remember they are not even open on Sunday's and will never be open on a Sunday. For its their agreement that they vowed to continue out the legacy of their parents, which is BEAUTIFUL.

Furthermore, Chik~ Fil~A has a certain character standard that they embody and expect for all their employees to embody the same standard. It's amazing to find out that Chik~ Fil~A is mirroring what it looks like to be a fast food chain of character. CEO Dan Cathy says he lives his life by these 3 M's, (Master, Mate, and Mission). In life we must figure out who our Master will be, who our mate will be, and what's our mission is.

Wow, we should all see the reason Chik~ Fil~A is considered the best in hospitality for the 8th time in the row. They have built their industry on standards of impeccable Character. These 3 M's is their definition of success. Success is the way we define it.

Today, I would like to encourage you. You are the best definition of what success looks like. As you have read we all have a different meaning, but we can honestly say that success is not tied into material things ~ your bank account. True success is defined in your character. Our character can embody richness or poverty. What does this means? Well, it can mean that your character is rich or poor. We are the only ones that can answer what does your character says about your success.

Our character stands, when all else fails. Build good character and you are on the latter to divine success.

Best,

Monique Houston

A PURPOSEFUL LIFE

By Christian Black

“You don’t have to know your purpose yet, but knowing you have one, places you on a path to find it. It points you towards an end goal, a result aimed at. You gain a sense of going somewhere, which in turn gives you Hope.” – Christian Black

Oftentimes we find ourselves in situations that seem to paralyze us. The situation doesn’t actually paralyze us, but only appears to. It is a matter of our own faulty perception.

According to Webster’s Seventh Collegiate Dictionary, paralyze has five senses in which it can be utilized. There are two senses that are relevant to this matter which are:

1. “To affect with paralysis (which means ‘a state of powerlessness or incapacity to act’)
2. “To make powerless or ineffective.”

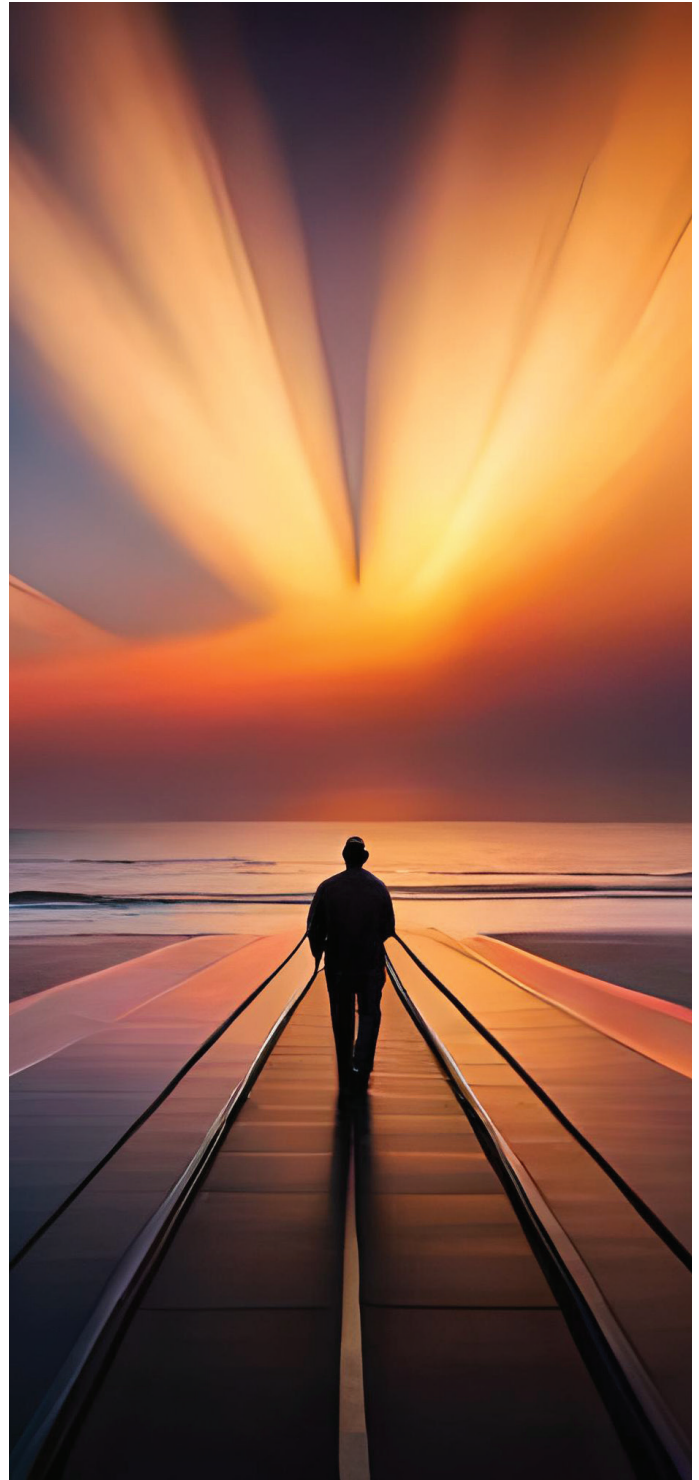
Certain situations if perceived in the wrong light will make us feel ineffective or powerless. We do not actually become ineffective or powerless, but possess a faulty perception. We fail to understand that despite the situation we have a purpose. Everyone experiences situations that seem to paralyze them because of a faulty perception. However, it is my brothers and sisters who are incarcerated that experiences this feeling of paralysis more.

Despite the circumstances, we still have a purpose. The mere fact of knowing that empowers us. Knowing and understanding we have purpose does three things for us:

- a). We gain direction,
- b). We receive hope, and
- c). We become focus.

Webster gives two definitions for purpose, one as a noun and the other as a verb transitive. The noun form, possess three senses which it can be utilized and it will be the second sense that will be the focal point.

Purpose means “An object or result aimed at.”



The definition presents the idea of an end goal, meaning the reason why something exists. It has a job, duty, or obligation to accomplish. Everything around us, was made for reason. They have object aimed at. For example, look at a table, T.V., and steel bars. Whether in society or in an institution of captivity, a table; is utilized for its intended purpose. People eat at it or sit down at it. A T.V.; is also used for its intended purpose, no matter its location. People will watch shows, games,

and movies on it. It is also the same for steel bars, which in society are called burglar bars or gates which is made to keep some people out and others in.

Steel bars create a barrier in society or in an institution of captivity. The idea is if mere manmade creations still operate in their intended purpose; despite the circumstances they are placed in, how much so the creation of the Almighty God.

Humans as the image bearers of God, were given a divine mandate (Read Genesis 1:27-28). The purpose of this article is not to tell you what your purpose is, but to remind you that you have a purpose despite the circumstances.

No matter how dark it looks, you can be in prison, going through a divorce, diagnosed with a terminal disease, or stuck at a dead end job, you have a purpose. The mere fact of knowing and understanding that, gives you direction.

You don't have to know your purpose yet, but knowing you have one, places you on a path to find it. It points you towards an end goal, a result aimed at. You gain a sense of going somewhere; which in turn; gives you Hope.

You receive hope, because knowing you have a purpose gives you something to look forward to; it's like it places a light at the end of a dark tunnel where you go from not seeing the end, to seeing an exit. Hope is important because it allows you to move forward and place one foot in front of the other even when you want to give up.

Then, knowing you have a purpose keeps you focused. You avoid unnecessary conflicts. It is like blinders, placed on racehorses. The blinders keep the horses from being distracted and veering off by something catching their attention from their peripheral.

Knowing you have a purpose keeps you from veering off into unnecessary conflicts and keeps you on the path to search out your purpose. My encouragement is to remind you to seek your purpose; so you can gain direction, receive hope, and become focused.

So remember you have a purpose.

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HOW HEALTHY IS YOUR SOIL?

By Brittany Monk

“Die as I may, I want it said of me that I pulled a weed and planted a flower wherever I thought a flower might grow.” -Abraham Lincoln

President Abraham Lincoln, best known to us for his honesty and activism, said it best in my opinion. We can draw from his words above, that he recognized the impact of pulling weeds from the Earth and replacing those weeds with something beautiful. But, let us be reflective for a moment, and also reason from his words that the President was not only referring to the land when he spoke this. He knew that the weeds of life; likewise, need to be pulled in order for an individual to truly flourish and prosper. We all wish to leave behind a fulfilling legacy, to have been successful; to have been respected. We all, wish to be remembered; for who we were and how we - no matter the size - made a difference in the world.

We may not act specifically for admiration, approval, or ovation however, the human nature within us does, indeed, wish to receive our flowers. Weeds are an unwanted and invasive species that when untreated and not tended to, rapidly spread and suffocate the soil around their roots, drawing in all of the nutrients and oxygen. Although weeds grow year-round, we are most likely to see them in larger quantity, as we come to the end of winter and the beginning of spring. When temperatures are lowest, the flowers in our garden go into dormancy and there is less maintenance required. Daily, we rush to our cars to get out of the cold, passing those dormant plants by.

As the Earth begins to gradually warm, the weeds take that opportunity to show off their skills. You may notice this - a weed here, a weed there - but it doesn't look too bad and you'll get to it soon, right? Weeks have gone by now and all of the holidays have passed. Your finances, have finally been caught up and you remember you need to tend to your garden. Growing season is right around the corner. Naturally, you want your garden to be the best looking in the neighborhood. You'd like for its beauty to be seen a mile away. You pay a visit to the local floral shop, and you pick out potted flowers; that just needs to be transferred to healthy soil. Key word: Healthy.

You arrive home, eager to get started on your garden, but you stop in your tracks. How did it get this bad? Not long ago, there were just a couple weeds, but now - dozens! Dreadfully you think to yourself, 'This is going to be a lot of work.' Spoiler alert: It will be worth it! Your garden will be beautiful. But first, you



must pull the weeds. This is the same for your life. There are weeds in your life, people that suffocate your soil, drawing in all of the nutrients and oxygen away from your roots. They drain you emotionally, mentally, physically, and/or spiritually. They distract you, discourage you, and detour you from the direction that leads to your success. Just like in your garden, the weeds of your life spread quickly if you allow them to do so. Where negativity sets in, it thrives and grows. More people come into your life in connection with that negativity. Negative circumstances sprout in your life as well. Things seem to fall apart. You get overwhelmed and life appears to be getting worse. My question to you is: How healthy is your soil?

When is the last time you weeded your garden?

If there are people, circumstances, or habits that are suffocating your soil, how can you eliminate them?

If there are negative words or thoughts that you are telling yourself and believing, what can you do to reverse those?

It is your responsibility to make your soil healthy. It is your responsibility to make your life's garden beautiful. If life appears to be only getting worse, then what's the harm in weeding, pruning, and eliminating?

Why not make the effort?

Why not reap the benefits of making your soil healthy again?

Your garden is your legacy. Your garden reflects your self-esteem, your success, your passion, and your prosperity. Your roots require nourishment. There are people and circumstances in your life that can provide some nourishment, but ultimately you must do your part in feeding positivity into your soil. It can be difficult to pull those weeds. You may be hesitant, because you don't want to hurt the feelings of others. You may be resistant to change. You may be reluctant to letting things go that you have grown accustomed to you. Although you are not where you want to be in life, you may have settled for comfort from what is familiar to you. You choose to accept this, versus fearing what's unknown and unfamiliar. Again, spoiler alert: It will be worth it!

Do not fear that as you pull these weeds, there will be gaping holes in your life. These holes; will be filled in sooner than you might anticipate. When you make room for good in your life that is a sign to the Universe that you are preparing to receive good, in your life. Good, will surely come about; in time, you will attract

all of the things you need in order to flourish and prosper. Other times, you will be responsible for personally planting flowers in place of those weeds. Before you know it, your garden will be grander than you fathomed it to be.

As time progresses, be mindful to continue its maintenance. Life is meant to be lived, with intention; do not simply let it pass by. Be careful not to put small issues off because they are not "too bad" and you'll "get to it soon." There is no time like the present.

Enjoy the beauty of the world around you.

Breathe proudly in each moment.

Even in times of darkness and bitter cold, do not rush through it. Stride through those times boldly and gracefully.

Hold your head up high.

This is your life.

I will leave you with one last question: Die as you may, what would you like it said of you?

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Featured Writers for This Issue

In this issue, I am proud to welcome ten (10) first-time writers to Spotlight on Recovery, twelve (12) contributing writers who joined the team between 2021-2023, and five (5) writers who joined the team between 2011-2022.

Juanmingo Becerra – I am a passionate writer, poet, and an artist. I like to find new ways to help people. This includes facilitating classes on how to be your best self, for our youth at risk; creating and donating art work for all types of organizations, especially for children’s hospitals.

Christian Black - My name is Christian Black, and I am a 33 year-old inspiring writer currently enrolled at The Heart of Texas College of Ministry seeking to earn a Bachelors Degree. During my spare time, I like to read books on history, Christianity and other religions and self-help. I also write poetry to express my thoughts.

Phillip Blackwell – This is Phillip Blackwell’s first article for Spotlight on Recovery magazine.

Leo Cardez is an award-winning essayist and playwright. His work has been supported by Prisoners Express, (Cornell University) and Prison Journalism Project (Penn State University). A 2021 Pushcart Press Prize finalist and PEN America Drama prize winner. He will be published in an anthology later this year. His writing can also be found in Under the Sun, Minutes Before Six, The Abolitionist, and Crime Report among other publications. He can be reached at Leo.Cardez.Writer@gmail.com

Dominique M. Carson is an award-winning and globally recognized freelance journalist, licensed massage practitioner, orator, and author. For over a decade, she interviewed over 100 notable figures in popular culture, such as Charlie Wilson, Regina Belle, Patti Labelle, Kirk Franklin, and many more. She also collaborated with Brooklyn historian and journalist Suzanne Spellman and launched a 118-page journal on Lefferts Manor, a neighborhood in Brooklyn.

Carson also served as Program and Communications Coordinator for Man Up! Inc., a non-profit organization located in East New York, Brooklyn. While at the organization, she received a citation from the New York City Council and the “It’s My Park Award” from the Partnership for Parks for community engagement in her hometown, East New York, Brooklyn.

In November 2020, she released a biography on R&B icon Jon B titled “Jon B: Are You Still Down?” Although published independently, “Jon B: Are You Still Down?” was an Amazon Hot New Release in One Hour Biography and Memoirs Short Reads. It was also featured in Book Authority’s 7 Best New R&B Music Books To Read, Goodreads, and Readers’ Favorite in 2021. She has received various awards, including 2x Author All-Star, the Global Iconic Changemaker Award, and the Global Recognition Award for her editorial and health/wellness work. She appeared in media outlets such as Sheen Magazine, Impact Magazine, Femi Magazine, Industry Times, and Forbes. One, VoyageLA, ShoutoutLA, and Bold Journey. Her overall goal is to facilitate people’s lives with her hands and words.

Deante K. Clay-My name is Deante K. Clay. I am from Houston, Texas and I’ve been incarcerated for ten years now. I hope to be paroled in 2024. While incarcerated I’ve taught myself so much about law, finance, and business. My book, “How to Support A Prisoner,” is available on Amazon.com.

Will Easter – This is Will Easter’s first article for Spotlight on Recovery magazine.

Arcane Element is a visionary who aspires to bring people together under a banner of harmony and advancement. He loves to write, and has written poetry, music, and articles for most of his life. He hopes to help inspire people who will spark the revolution for change.

Currently a hostage in the Arkansas Department of Corrections, he is working towards receiving a reduction of sentence so he may have a second chance at life. All interested parties may contact by mail or by e-mail. Please limit your letters to two pages.

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Greg Ennis – This is Greg Ennis’ first article for Spotlight on Recovery magazine.

Jay Glenewinkel was born and raised in San Antonio. Through his early adult life, he has traveled clear across the United States as well as to Mexico and Canada. His hobbies include railroads, photography, music, and writing. In addition, he has been involved in numerous charity organizations from animal rescues to cancer research. Since 1991, he has worked actively as an event promoter in the music industry on a local and regional level as well as working a few years in the transportation industry.

While Jay has been writing for most of his life, he is now focusing his attention on getting his work published. He continues to search for ways to improve his writing and overall outlook on life in general.

Robin Graham was born and raised in the Fort Greene section of Brooklyn, New York and she still resides in Brooklyn, New York. She has four sons, and two grand-cats named Halo and Benjamin. She loves writing, listening to music, a good laugh, classic movies, helping people grow, and the New York Islanders hockey team. As the founder and publisher of the acclaimed Spotlight on Recovery magazine, she felt a nudge from her contributing writers to move the needle and dig deeper into the psyche of individuals shuttered away from the light and their loved ones. Robin believes that by increasing the light in the dark corners of facilities and prisons all over the United States from the inside, it would light the way for the others to follow. As Above, So Below, is a positive light and it burns bright in the hearts and souls of the twenty-plus hand-picked writers that will fill the pages of a gift of Hope.

Edgar Hendricks – Edgar joined the magazine in 2023. His first article appeared in the June 2023 issue, “Unchecked Trauma: The New Face of Mental Illness.”

Monique Houston is a 36- year old woman born and raised in Southwest Louisiana. She is a tenacious driven woman of God, a mother who continues to set the best example for her children. She successfully earned her AA in General Studies and BA in Mass Communication, both through Ashland University. Houston also is an active member of Toastmaster's, an International speaking club where she is harnessing her craft to not only finesse the art of her writing but also to continue to speak efficiently and effectively. Houston is also the author and founder of B.B.U. her first inspirational - motivational book for young girls and women. Houston has worked diligently to build a platform for young girls and women to ensure that our sisterhood remains solid. Houston has continued this movement of empowerment by launching B.B.U. blog, which will launch on Sept 1st. She embodies commitment and consistency, as a woman who not only thrives to make the world a better place, Houston is leading out a legacy that she knows goes beyond herself.

Anthony Jones – I am currently in the works of getting my first novel published. As well as I'm writing intriguing pieces and doing journalistic work as a freelance writer, I have dabbled in grant-writing, poetry and ghost-writing several genres of music for developing talents. I have even begun to venture into philosophical material and erotica. However, my greatest feat yet is being published, in Spotlight on Recovery magazine five times. (See Writer's Choice, Part 5, October 2022, and Movies with a Message, January 2023, A Letter to the Purpose Who Hurt Me, February 2023, Unchecked Trauma: The New Face of Mental Illness, June 2023 and Writer's Choice, Part 7.)

Therewith, I have dedicated my life to just helping people. Giving back! Now, when one thinks, "Giving back, you would think of someone having something to give, but no, I haven't yet amassed any great fortune, but through the struggle, I have a sense of self, a sense of knowledge, a sense of purpose and direction; all of which translates to wealth and even more, peace. That's what I want to give back. That's what I want to share with the world (especially our brothers and sisters in the struggle.)

Anyone who wishes to ask me any questions, give any personal advice, build together, simply converse, or is in need of guidance or a shoulder to lean on, I'm here. For now, until I go home (in which I go up before the Parole Board in 2025) my address is:

Anthony Jones, ADC#139006
Tucker MSU (2 Barracks 4 cell)
2501 State Farm Road
Tucker, AR 72168-9567

Paulette Kengg is a retired award-winning editor and author of four books, including a series to help people going through hard times. She is a happily married Christian wife, mother, and grandmother. You can contact her at: <https://SpiritLedSobriety.com>.

Her books are in an e-mail dated 11/20/23 and 1/15/2024

Lee Malis – I am a Romanian "Roma" Gypsy, a real ethnic racial minority and I have lived and learned the culture in 10 American states. I've been a published writer for 51 years. I am a satirical columnist, professional credits in most fiction genres, an instructor in creative writing for "Community Education." My resume includes an option on a screenplay, "The Private World," purchased by a Hollywood studio.

Currently, I'm working on two fantasy novellas. "The Sun Visits a Son and Three Stars, and "Purrrfect Cat Retribution." I am a 'pen pal' with 24 people, and looking for more. I also write a daily journal.

My pen is a mirror for all the chapters in my charismatic being. Each one is an anticipation of opening a wrapped Christmas gift.

To correspond with Lee, write to:

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Duluth, MN 55805

Steven McNinch – This is Steven McNinch’s first submission for Spotlight on Recovery Magazine.

Brittany Monk - is 25 years old, is from South Louisiana. Although incarcerated, she is pursuing a Bachelor’s of Arts degree through Tulane University. She is the author of Practice Makes Permanent, a children’s book she wrote dedicated to her son, as well as H.O.P.E., an empowerment book on coping through trying circumstances. She continues to write in hopes to encourage others to be their best and press forward. She can be reached at:

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Efrain Pedro Morales, Jr., who has published abroad in newspapers, newsletters, and magazines, including Spotlight on Recovery, is also a Certified Braille Transcriber. He is the author of *Mis-understood and Mis-diagnosed: Living with a Disorder*, and *Am I Really a Monster?* He is currently finalizing a Fantasy Fiction book, titled *Leena & the Keeper of Magics*.

Jeff Morrison - My name is Harold “ Jeff Morrison, “ my friends and family call me “Jeff.” I grew up in Northern California, or should I say “In the California Penal System” and also on the streets.

I’m 54 years old and I have been on my own since the age of 10, but I’m not making any excuses nor am I complaining , it is what it has been .I’m the youngest of 5, I have an older brother who’s blind who grew up with my grandma . I have 3 older sisters as well whom I love with all my heart. We’ve all been on our own since a very young age. My mom wasn’t a bad mom, she was single and did the best she could. None of us went without while we were in her home, she loved us and did all she could to provide.

When my mom found true love, me and her new love bumped heads right away. He said it was his way or the highway, so I hit the streets and learned real fast how to survive.

I slept in empty apartments, vacant houses and learned how to steal just to eat. I would walk into stores, pick up what I needed and would run out, I was a fast runner, had to be. I slept in Salvation Army drop bins also, and that’s where I picked up clean clothes to wear too. I did all kinds of things to survive, and to think of it I did a pretty good job, for a 10-year old. I eventually ended up in the penal system, from Juvenile hall to the California Youth Authority from age 15 to 20-years old.

I went in and out the system for years. I’m a different person now, and through my stories I hope to help others and change their lives. I want them to see that no matter who you are or what you think or have been through, it’s never too late to turn all that around , not even when you’re in prison like me; possibly for the rest of my life.

Marco Noguerras – is a creator of visionary experiences. An artist of imagery and word transcending the boundaries of extraordinary. NYRican raised in the era of Hip-Hop. He’s always been a B-boy at heart. Break dancing, drawing graffiti and rapping since a kid. In adulthood he has traversed to poetry, tattooing and drawing portraits. Marco is known to put an image to exact the words and feeling his tattoo clients express to him, evoking illuminating by drawing emotional resonance with his writing.

Nina Rondon - Nina is a Brooklyn-born mental health advocate, writer, creative workshop organizer and facilitator, and presenter for the NAMI-NYC; In Our Own Voice and Ending the Silence programs. She's also a community manager at The Mighty, and creator of reflection and empowerment blog sparklywartanks.com.

She's passionate about sharing her story to help end the stigma around mental health conditions as well as encourage, inspire, and motivate others. In her free time, she enjoys watching anime, crafting, and spending time with her family.

Glenn Slaby is married with one son. As a former accountant with an MBA, Glenn has always lived with mental illness, undiagnosed until in his mid-thirties. This diagnosis was incorrect. Twelve years later a proper psychoanalysis was established. Through ongoing therapy other conditions were discovered. He currently works part-time at St. Vincent's Hospital, Harrison, NY, where treatment is received. He obtained an MFA in Creative Writing at the College of New Rochelle in 2019 and is also a Eucharistic Minister in his parish. He is the author of 100 plus, published articles and letters. His website is www.glennslaby.com

Bob Williams, Jr.- has been on California death row for 27 years, in essence, since his arrest at the age of 18. He is an artist who paints in watercolor and now writes. He is currently working on two books. One on a new History of Krav Maga and the other on, The History of Mythology, Philosophy, Metaphor, etc. of the Japanese Sword – The Katana. His dream is to one day, get out of prison and to work with youth who have suffered trauma and abuse, and who have found themselves in the juvenile system. Bob says, "Really! I want to change the world!"

Joseph Williams - My name is Joseph Williams and I'm 43yrs old. I was born and raised in West Philadelphia. For some small periods I resided in New Jersey and in Georgia where I went to school and was able to experience some diversity outside of city living but still graduating from Overbook High School (West Philadelphia) in 1998. I made an attempt at college but financially, and mentally it became overwhelming. Eventually, I graduated in 2006 from New Orleans Technical Institute for Residential & Commercial Electricity.

I am a father of 5 sons and 2 grandchildren, as well as a husband. Since the age of 14, I loved to write and perform my music. I would record and put out multiple projects independently, however prison always derailed any big break for me. Naturally, I became a serious writer and fell in love with poetry and storytelling. Now with a new passion, I look to leave my mark upon the world to inspire, entertain, and bring awareness through my writings.

Leslie Williams – is an incarcerated author serving a life sentence. During his time in prison, he has written several unpublished songs and poems, under the name Kleva Talent. His debut published novel, "Just Words: Who Will Teach Our Women?" is available online at Cadmus Publishing Company, BNN.com, and Amazon.com

He can be reached by snail mail at:

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Or by text via Securus.com – search for Leslie Williams #250996, adding your name to his contact list.

Richie Leo Williams -Richie Leo Williams is 54 years old. By way of Baltimore, Maryland, I wasn't born into my forty acres and a mule, but I am blessed with the best Mommy and loving family in the world. Writing is my dessert, my medicine, a creative world that I've been visiting off and on since I was a teenager. Thank you, Robin Graham of R. Graham Publishing, for allowing me and trusting in my first published issue.

I am currently serving 18 years in the Virginia Dept of corrections for a candy store robbery, no weapons, no one hurt. Heroin was my pimp. Mental health remains my daily struggle. I am currently appealing my case pro bono. The hate stopped once I've accepted responsibility for the robbery; then the peace that followed allowed me to see the light. I can't fight hate with hate. They say, "Man can't live by bread alone." I want to reach all men when it comes to living honestly. I've been lying to myself for years. My contact information is Richie Leo Williams, #115362

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Tiffany Woods - My name is Tiffany M. Woods, I am a former lifer; my sentence was reduced to 36 years. I am a proud mother of four young adults. I am an author of an eBook titled Family Traditions. In addition, I am a member of Toastmasters International, and I graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. I also serve my gated community as a counsel sub.

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Shawn Younker - is an author from Pennsylvania. He contributes regularly to The Prison Journalism Project, The Marshal Project, and Graterfriends. As an avid fiction writer, his work has also been published in The Blotter Magazine, Carve, and The River Styx.

He has self- published one novel and is currently at work compiling a collection of short stories. He hopes to publish a compendium of prison essays in the summer of 2024. You can comment on his work via Facebook, or write to him @

Shawn Younker,
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